

CRITICAL SCENES OF DESIRE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY FICTION

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I declare that this thesis was composed solely by myself, Kristyn Gorton

*To the memory of my great-grandmother,
Margaret Gorton Geckler*

It would have been an absence-word, a hole-word, whose centre would have been hollowed out into a hole, the kind of hole in which all other words would have been buried. It would have been impossible to utter it, but it would have been made to reverberate. Enormous, endless, an empty gong, it would have held back anyone who had wanted to leave, it would have convinced them of the impossible, it would have made them deaf to any other word save that one, in one fell swoop it would have defined the future and the moment themselves.

Marguerite Duras,
The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines scenes of desire in twentieth-century literary and theoretical discourse. It argues that the scene of desire and the critical readings that follow not only demonstrate how desire is linked to the question of woman but also how desire evades critical readings that attempt to fix meaning or demand definition. Moving towards a critical practice which does not impose singular and restrictive interpretations of desire, this thesis approaches scenes of desire as textual moments that allow for multiple and open-ended critiques. Instead of trying to force meaning out of desire, this thesis examines how desire functions within literary and critical texts in order to consider alternative approaches to the question of desire. Interdisciplinary in scope, this project includes writing from H.D. and Marguerite Duras, feminist and psychoanalytic theory, and visual art by Carolee Schneeman and Jenny Holzer. Each chapter begins with an analysis of a scene of desire and then proceeds to an examination of the ways in which this scene is understood in psychoanalytic and feminist theory.

The first chapter examines how Freud and Lacan connect lack to the 'truth' of anatomy and the question of woman. This chapter also analyses the alternatives to psychoanalytic constructions of desire as theorised by French feminists, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, and performance artist Carolee Schneeman. The second chapter discusses the analytic scene between H.D. and Freud as represented in her *Tribute to Freud*. The third chapter draws on an article by Jacques Lacan about the Papin sisters entitled, "Motifs du Crime Paranoïque," in order to examine the intersection Lacan constructs between 'knowledge' and 'woman.' The fourth chapter

analyses representations of desire and analysis in Marguerite Duras's narratives, *Moderato Cantabile* and *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, and argues that her resistance to providing a narrative cure illustrates the way she leaves desire open to interpretation. The final chapter introduces and considers Deleuze and Guattari's innovative theories on desire in *Anti-Oedipus*. This chapter also engages with feminist responses to Deleuze and Guattari in order to question the possibilities and limitations they offer.

INTRODUCTION

DESIRE, FEMINISM AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

This dissertation focuses on the theorisation of desire in psychoanalysis, feminism, twentieth-century literature, and in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. This thesis begins with an examination of how desire has been theorised in psychoanalytic and feminist interpretations and moves towards alternative perspectives of desire in fictional representations and in Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical texts. In using the words "moves towards," I am not suggesting that this thesis arrives at a conclusive or exhaustive definition of desire nor will it construct a 'new' framework to theorise desire for future use. Underlying this project is a conviction that desire should not be limited by restrictive and singular theoretical models.

I began this thesis with the intention of producing an alternative way of thinking about desire, one opposed to the negative and restrictive interpretations of desire in psychoanalysis. However, as my research progressed, I recognised that in setting up the psychoanalytic approach as 'negative' and my own as 'positive' I was running the risk of constructing an argument that only opposed existing interpretations. In other words, basing an argument in reaction and in response to psychoanalytic models will always place my critique in a dependent and oppositional relationship to psychoanalysis. As I discuss in Chapter One, arguments that oppose psychoanalytic models, such as those found in work by French feminists, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, produce counter positions which do not actually provide theorists with tenable alternatives to the question of desire.

Instead of returning to psychoanalytic interpretations to rewrite what is 'wrong' or to 'cure' phallogentric logic with feminism, I examine the ways in which psychoanalysis and feminism can be read together, instead of one as dominant to the other. In other words, I want to resist psychoanalysing feminism and feminising psychoanalysis. Instead of applying one to the other in a hierarchical model, or inverting one to 'teach' the other, I want to level the playing field as much as possible so they can both 'learn' from each other. This multivalent approach to theory can be found in recent feminist work. For example, feminist theorist, Diane Elam brings seemingly opposing movements together in order to read them side by side, whether feminism and deconstruction, feminism and feminism, or postmodernism and romanticism.¹ In *Feminism and Deconstruction: Ms. en Abyrne*, instead of applying a deconstructive reading to feminist theory, Elam successfully draws deconstruction and feminism together to read for what she terms a "disruptive linkage."²

Terms such as "disruptive linkage" and what another critic calls "interimplications"³ help to phrase interdisciplinary or "crossdisciplinary"⁴ projects, such as this one, which examine the possibilities that emerge when reading two fields together. Instead of reading one discipline as a master discourse to another, it is possible to consider the arguments in each at the same time, without privileging one

¹ Diane Elam follows this approach in *Feminism Beside Itself*, ed. by Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman (New York: Routledge, 1995); in *Romancing the Postmodern* (New York: Routledge, 1992); and in *Feminism and Deconstruction: Ms. en Abyrne* (London: Routledge, 1994).

² Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction: Ms. en Abyrne*, p. 13.

³ Dianne Chisholm, *H.D.'s Freudian Poetics: Psychoanalysis in Translation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 2. Chisholm's work will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

⁴ In *Feminism and Deconstruction*, Diane Elam uses "crossdisciplinary" instead of "interdisciplinary" following Derrida's influence. She argues that the "crossing through is a mark of questioning (a cross-examination), which does not completely obliterate or erase the original term," pp. 11.

over the other. This 'sideways' look at theory allows a critic to move beyond reductive arguments that position one idea in relation to its more dominant other.

This approach is particularly useful in theorising desire. Feminists are often relegated to a position of dutiful daughter in their relationship to a psychoanalytic 'father.' And so, a feminist approach to desire is assessed by how it does and does not relate to its psychoanalytic predecessor. One way out of these redundant debates, is to explore the ways in which the two work together and separately over the question of desire and 'woman.' Instead of tracing the ways in which one follows the other, it is useful to explore how and when they function together as well as when they pull apart, for these intersections and divergences gesture towards alternative ways of thinking about desire.

It is difficult and problematic to discuss desire without mentioning psychoanalysis. Although some, including myself, would like to avoid Freud or Lacan in their analysis of desire, doing so overlooks the dominant influence psychoanalysis continues to have over a theorisation of desire. Psychoanalysis underlines so many of the critical discussions we, as theorists, engage with on issues such as the body, identity and particularly on desire. To dismiss psychoanalysis as 'outdated' is to overlook the way it has infiltrated the way we think through desire to such an extent that it would be impossible to claim that the language we use does not share a resonant cord with psychoanalysis.

However, in making this claim for psychoanalysis I would also like to specify that I read psychoanalytic works as theoretical texts, not scripture. I do not subscribe to psychoanalytic interpretations that use psychoanalysis as a tool to unlock a secret 'meaning' in fiction. Like other theories, psychoanalysis is subject to contradiction,

inconsistencies and faulty logic. I am therefore reading psychoanalysis for the way it theorises desire, not as a guidebook for what desire is.

Although I do not have the same hesitation in using feminist theory as I do in using psychoanalytic theory, I recognise that feminism carries with it its own limitations and restrictions. Each chapter not only address the difficulties a psychoanalytic perspective poses but also considers the limitations a feminist interpretation presents to a theorisation of desire.

The approach I take in this thesis can be termed ‘deconstructive’ as it examines contradictions and inconsistencies in seemingly consistent arguments. Although Derrida’s work appears in the margins, he does not take centre stage in my examination of desire. His work on psychoanalysis, namely in *Resistances to Psychoanalysis* and in *The Post Card*, does offer readers an alternative way of approaching Freud and Lacan’s theoretical models, however, I have chosen instead to focus on Deleuze and Guattari’s critique in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. Deleuze and Guattari’s texts concentrate more specifically on desire and the way it is theorised in psychoanalytic theory. Their approach to desire not only offers readers an alternative way of thinking through desire but also demonstrates a theoretical style that is useful in countering the strength and dominance of psychoanalytic interpretations.

WRITING DESIRE

Desire’s abstract and enigmatic nature makes it a difficult concept to elucidate. Catherine Belsey articulates the difficulties and challenges in writing about desire in her brilliant analysis entitled *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture*. She writes: “Desire: a kind of madness, an enchantment, exaltation, anguish. . .

perhaps the foundation of a lifetime of happiness. Writing about desire: compulsive, a challenge, self-indulgence, anxiety. . . above all, a project that defies completion.”⁵ Belsey voices the contradictory emotions that run through a critical approach to desire. It is at once inspiring and exciting and, at another, infuriatingly complicated and formidable.

Belsey also alludes to the elusive quality of projects on desire. Similar to Belsey’s, my project “defies completion” which, means that I am not attempting to solve or remedy the problem of desire, nor am I capable of offering a solution to the question of desire. Instead, this project embraces a degree of indeterminacy that desire engenders. As mentioned, this project traces the intersections and divergences within a feminist and psychoanalytic theorisation of desire in an attempt to consider alternative possibilities, not in order to conclusively ‘solve’ desire. Although my work shares some similarities to Belsey’s approach to desire, her project focuses more on the metaphysics of desire and how desire shapes identity; I am interested in how desire is theorised and the way in which it resists theorisation.

Throughout this thesis I refer to the word “desire.” In order to clarify my use of this word, I suggest that desire, used as a noun or a verb, refers to a deep and intense emotion for something whether a person, place or object. The ‘longing’ or ‘yearning’ that is often used to define desire does not need to insinuate a negative component. It is possible to have a desire for something or someone that the ‘desirer’ already possesses. Instead of framing desire in terms of acquisition (new car, new house, et al), desire can be understood in terms of how it stimulates change, creates connections and inspires movement.

⁵ Catherine Belsey, *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1994), p. 3.

I have deliberately left this explanation vague because I feel that desire is best left loosely defined. The more we, as theorists, attempt to pin down meanings and map out frameworks to analyse desire, the more it will elude our grasp. Instead of trying to fix the limits of desire it is useful to examine how desire functions within textual and critical boundaries in order to consider alternative ways of understanding and approaching desire. It may also be useful to accept a certain degree of non-understanding in a theorisation of desire. As part of its structure, desire is indefinable. It does not 'make sense' all the time nor does it fit neatly into any one theoretical framework. That is one reason why I will approach the question of desire within an interdisciplinary or "crossdisciplinary" dissertation.

SCENES OF DESIRE

By 'scenes of desire' I mean a textual location where an author or critic attempts to define or interpret desire. I use the word 'scene' for several reasons. The first refers to the descriptive quality in an author or a critic's attempt to construct an event of desire. S/he paints a 'scene' of desire in language or constructs one within a theoretical framework. For example, Marguerite Duras's *Moderato Cantabile* begins with a description of a *crime passionnel*, a man shoots his wife in a café. This image or "scene of desire" is repeated throughout the text and is an essential part of the character and plot development. It functions both as a way of narrating desire in the text and of keeping a reader from fully understanding what desire means.

Despite an author or critic's attempt to pin down desire in language, it often remains a mystery. For this reason, I suggest that 'scene' reflects a performative quality in desire. Desire can be thought of in terms of movement – it moves within

literary and theoretical texts. Any attempt made by a critic or reader to formulate an answer or construct a framework to contain the question of desire usually results in failure.

Finally, the word ‘scene’ refers to an analytic scene and a psychoanalytic approach to desire. Because psychoanalytic interpretations are so influential in a theorisation of desire, it is important to understand the function of desire in analysis. In Chapter Two, I examine the relationship between an analyst, Freud and his analysand, H.D. in order to discuss how desire functions in an analytic scene and in the rewriting of this scene.

My use of the word “critical” refers to ways in which these scenes of desire are handled theoretically, whether from a psychoanalytic or feminist position. In each chapter, I address the critical interpretations, both from a psychoanalytic and a feminist perspective, in order to demonstrate the similarities and differences in the two approaches.

Before outlining the individual chapters, I would like to briefly mention the “and” that joins the two ideas or writers in each heading. “And” has a notable history in projects on psychoanalysis, feminism and literature;⁶ titles such as Shoshana Felman’s *Psychoanalysis and Literature*, Juliet Mitchell’s *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, and Jane Gallop’s *The Daughter’s Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, all reflect the way the two fields are interconnected and yet set at odds with each other. The “and” in my chapter headings reflects the thinking that

⁶ See also, Shoshana Felman’s explanation of “and” in “To Open the Question,” in *Psychoanalysis and Literature The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, ed. by Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 5-10; Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: A Radical Reassessment of Freudian Psychoanalysis* (London: Penguin, 2000; originally published 1974); Jane Gallop, *The Daughter’s Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. xi-xv; Diane Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction : Ms. en Abyme*, pp. 13-15.

comes before my own and also gestures towards the possibility of reading the two ideas listed in each chapter title in light of what we, as theorists, can learn from reading them together.

The first part of Chapter One examines how Freud and Lacan connect lack to the 'truth' of anatomy and the question of woman. The second part analyses the alternatives to psychoanalytic interpretations of desire as theorised by French feminists, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous in order to assess the ways in which 'desire' and 'woman' remain caught in a static logic. In the final part, I consider work by performance artist Carolee Schneeman and feminist theorist Diane Elam as a way of discussing alternative perspectives to theorising desire.

In Chapter One, I also examine the 'lack' that is assigned to 'woman' in psychoanalytic interpretations and the 'lack' that is cited within feminist critiques. In doing so, I am not trying to dismantle phallogentric logic in order to rebuild another restrictive logic in its place, rather I am examining the ways in which 'lack' circulates in psychoanalytic and feminist critiques in order to rethink the way we, as feminists, can approach 'lack.'

Psychoanalysis grounds its understanding of desire within the interaction between analyst and analysand, for this reason, as well as others, it is important to understand the processes and dynamics in the analytic scene. Chapter Two examines the analytic scene between H.D. and Freud as represented in her *Tribute to Freud*. H.D.'s *Tribute* offers her readers a unique opportunity to gain an understanding of how desire arises within analysis. Her *Tribute* also offers us, as theorists, a way of examining the issues between feminism and psychoanalysis. In the second part of this chapter, I explore feminist criticisms of *Tribute to Freud* in order to demonstrate

the way critics behave as analysts in their quest to discover answers to female agency and desire within H.D.'s text. I argue that *Tribute* not only demonstrates the indeterminacy in writing about desire but also gestures towards ways that we, as theorists, try to solve its ambiguity.

Moving from Freud to Lacan, the third chapter focuses on Lacan's contribution to a theorisation of desire by reading some of his earlier works. Chapter Three begins with an article written by Jacques Lacan about the Papin sisters entitled, "Motifs du Crime Paranoïque," as it illustrates the intersection Lacan draws between 'knowledge' and 'woman.' Lacan's article on the Papin sisters also demonstrates the way he builds 'truth' by assembling the signifiers of sexuality into a conclusive diagnosis. His neatly assembled 'answer' to the enigma of female desire is then used as 'truth' by the subsequent critiques of his article. I will argue in the second part of this chapter that critiques of Lacan's article perform voyeuristic readings of the Papin crime, which privilege the subtle suggestions of lesbian desire over the reality of murder. In order to further discuss the intersection between sexual desire and aggression, I will also address work by artist Jenny Holzer.

The fourth chapter analyses representations of desire and analysis in Marguerite Duras's narratives, *Moderato Cantabile* and *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*. Duras's work offers an alternative way of thinking through important issues in theorising desire and illustrates problems with existing models. She constructs representations of women as lacking and yet she does not constitute this lack with masculine desire, instead she leaves the 'lack' in place, both in her characters and within the text itself. This is troubling to some of her critics, namely Julia Kristeva, who argues that Duras's lack of any 'narrative cure' signals her failure as a writer. I

argue that this lack of a textual solution forces Duras's readers and critics to question the desire in the text and how it functions within the lives of her characters. I argue that her resistance to provide a narrative 'cure' illustrates the way she leaves desire open to interpretation.

The final chapter will focus on the possibilities for theorising desire that arise in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. Like Irigaray and Cixous, Deleuze and Guattari return to the fundamental 'truths' of psychoanalysis in order to refigure interpretations of desire. However, instead of trying to rewrite or correct psychoanalytic interpretations, Deleuze and Guattari question how these 'truths' function. For example, they ask whether the psychoanalytic 'cure' really cures. In doing so, they not only suggest alternative ways to approach psychoanalytic interpretations but they offer a model of thinking that does not simply oppose psychoanalysis. Their thinking encourages theorists to look at how a text functions rather than what it means. This is an important distinction in terms of desire. Instead of trying to close down on a meaning for desire in texts, we, as theorists, can look at how desire functions.

This chapter will also consider how Deleuze and Guattari's theory on the 'becoming-woman' has inhibited feminist theorists from recognising the potential in their theoretical approach to desire. Although Deleuze and Guattari offer alternative models to psychoanalytic interpretations of desire, they have been largely criticised by feminist critics who see them as a threat to fundamental concerns in feminist theory. I trace these arguments in order to suggest that although Deleuze and Guattari present problems to feminist theory, they also gesture towards innovative ways of

thinking about desire that deserve consideration. Although Deleuze and Guattari's work appears at the end of this thesis their influence can be noted throughout.

Each chapter considers a theorisation of desire in relation to psychoanalytic and feminist theory. Although I have tried to incorporate as many perspectives as possible in my examination of desire, this thesis does not presume to have covered every angle. Part of the aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that the present frameworks used in a theorisation of desire do not adequately explain how desire functions in theory or in fiction. In assessing these inconsistencies I am not attempting to erect a new structure in their place. Instead, I am suggesting that the only way forward or even 'sideways' is to maintain a continual engagement with alternative interpretations and the questions that arise from them.

1. LACK AND FEMINISM

“Desire” is often accompanied by “lack” in critical discussions on desire, whether from a psychoanalytic or feminist perspective. I have included ‘feminism’ in the second part of the title because ‘lack’ is often taken from psychoanalytic interpretations and used in the context of feminist alternatives to psychoanalytic critiques on desire. At times this critical ‘lifting’ causes confusion about the term and its use within interpretations of desire. As a way of moving beyond reductive arguments between feminism and psychoanalysis over the term ‘lack,’ this chapter examines various interpretations as well as alternative ways of approaching ‘lack’ in discussions on desire.

This chapter is divided into three sections: the first part will examine how Freud and Lacan connect lack to the ‘truth’ of anatomy and to the question of woman. The second section will analyse the response to psychoanalytic interpretations of desire as theorised by French feminists, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, in order to assess the ways in which ‘desire’ and ‘woman’ remain caught in a static logic. The final part will consider work by performance artist Carolee Schneeman and feminist theorist Diane Elam as a way of discussing alternative perspectives to theorising desire.

DESIRE IN THEORY

Critical approaches to desire, whether they are deeply rooted in psychoanalytic structures or attempt to posit an alternative construction, often begin

by tracing the 'history' of desire. Even here, I am constructing a 'history' of what comes before this study, in order to locate for my reader where it fits within the present work on desire. Critical exploration of the theory or theories of desire that aim to rewrite, rethink, refigure or revise often find themselves in the position of having to remember the theories that precede their own. Often more time is spent in confronting the influence of figures such as Lacan, Freud, Hegel and Deleuze than the actual work of constructing an alternative approach. The strength and dominance of a psychoanalytic perspective within theories on desire is unavoidable. Whether or not one agrees with the fundamental concepts within psychoanalysis is secondary to whether or not one confronts them when looking for alternatives. In their introduction to *Feminism and Sexuality*, Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott tell their readers: "Psychoanalysis retains a strong foothold within feminist theorising on sexuality. It is still often treated as if it were the only perspective which can explain our individual sexual desires. Its influence may be due, in part, to the lack of viable alternatives."⁷ Jackson and Scott acknowledge the difficulties that feminist critics have in constructing interpretations of female sexuality that lie outside the confines of psychoanalysis. They also allude to the 'viability' of these alternatives, suggesting that critiques that do not refer to psychoanalytic structures are often considered to be without enough critical merit to survive on their own.

However, part of the reason why psychoanalysis maintains a strong foothold is due to the feminist use of psychoanalysis. Whether or not they agree with the fundamental concepts that psychoanalysis theorises, feminist theorists often use psychoanalysis, particularly Lacanian psychoanalysis, as a critical reference point to

⁷ Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott, eds. *Feminism and Sexuality: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 10.

substantiate or articulate critiques on subjectivity, representation and sexuality and in so doing validate its dominance.⁸ The works of feminist theorists Julia Kristeva and Catherine Clément, for instance, demonstrates a strong allegiance to Lacan's theoretical analyses.⁹

The influence of psychoanalysis may also seem a necessary one for those attempting to construct "viable alternatives." The process of remembering the theories that precede one's own reinscribe and locate the discussion within a dominant logic. Perhaps there are few alternatives because these refigurings are so entrenched in the act of re-memembering and revising.

Elizabeth Grosz's essay entitled "Refiguring Lesbian Desire" provides a good example of the problems and possibilities that arise in feminist revisions of female desire. Her short and yet powerful reading sets up two of the most important issues in a feminist approach to desire. First, I would like to draw attention to the methodology Grosz uses. Grosz's refiguring begins with a persuasive 'history' of how desire has been understood from Plato to Deleuze.¹⁰ I am placing 'history' in brackets to signpost that I do not believe that there is any *one* history of desire, nor do I think Grosz believes this. Instead, I would argue that there are multiple histories of desire based upon differing agendas, be they feminist, psychoanalytic, economic or philosophical. In order to talk about desire Grosz first discusses the way desire has been theorised until now. In her essay, she traces the epistemology of desire from

⁸ See also, *Feminism and Deconstruction: Ms. en Abyrne*, Elam writes: "Rather than follow in Freud's patriarchal footsteps, a number of feminists have found Lacan's rereading of Freud a valuable contribution towards an understanding of gender-roles as masks rather than norms," pp. 45-46; Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990).

⁹ See also Catherine Clément, *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

¹⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, "Refiguring Lesbian Desire," in *The Lesbian Postmodern*, ed. by Laura Doan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 67-84 (pp. 74-76).

Plato, Hegel, Freud and Lacan, and then later through the work of Spinoza and Deleuze and Guattari. This methodology exposes one way in which feminist theorists become indebted to the discourses that precede their inquiry. In order to discuss woman's desire, a feminist theorist must first approach how woman's desire has been appropriated by other more dominant discourses.

Examining master discourses in an effort to rethink alternatives inevitably inscribes a theorist within the framework s/he is attempting to revise. In her influential essay entitled, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defence Intellectuals," Carol Cohn theorises her experience on the 'inside' of the debate surrounding nuclear weapons and arms control.¹¹ Her encounter allows her to reflect on the way dominant discourses affect the way we, as feminists, think and speak. Despite her efforts to remain an interested observer, Cohn finds herself becoming entrenched in the language of the 'defence intellectuals.' Cohn describes her entrance into what she terms, "technostrategic"¹² thinking: "Part of the appeal was the thrill of being able to manipulate an arcane language, the power of entering the secret kingdom, being someone in the know."¹³ Cohn's honest revelation is perhaps closer to home than most feminist theorists would care to admit. The desire to enter into the secret realm of another discourse is potent and seductive; to know and to understand a dominant discourse can lure even the most resolute patriot into enemy territory. Determined to reclaim their own interpretations, many feminists enter into the study of psychoanalysis without recognising the way in which it changes and modifies their original inquiries and beliefs.

¹¹ Carol Cohn, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defence Intellectuals," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 12. 4 (1997), pp. 687-718.

¹² Cohn, "Sex and Death," p. 690, footnote 6.

¹³ Cohn, "Sex and Death," p. 704.

Cohn acknowledges that the price that comes with admission into this “secret kingdom” is a transformation of your own language and ideas.¹⁴ Although this new language gives Cohn access to ideas she was unaware of before, it also begins to alter others. Cohn argues that part of the reason for this change is that the terminology defence intellectuals use removes them from the reality of the subject matter they discuss: “There *is* no reality of which they speak. Or rather, the ‘reality’ of which they speak is itself a world of abstractions.”¹⁵ This “world of abstractions” can surely be extended to include psychoanalytic discourse. Anxious to protect and defend itself from exposure, psychoanalysis fortifies its walls against intrusive observers. There are so many terms to learn and concepts to understand that it often seems as though one must be an analyst in order to fully understand psychoanalysis.

In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan’s influential text on the women’s movement, she asks: “How can an educated American woman, who is not herself an analyst, presume to question a Freudian truth? [...] How can she presume to tread the sacred ground where only analysts are allowed?”¹⁶ Friedan’s question responds to the fear and anxiety in treading on the holy land of psychoanalysis. She touches on the insecurity of not being ‘allowed’ to enter into the sacred spaces of a discourse one has only a certain amount of understanding; a concern that reflects the issues Cohn’s essay identifies. Friedan’s question also raises the issue of privilege and capability. Can a literary critic ‘use’ psychoanalysis without having undergone both analysis and training as an analyst? It is understandable that analysts find their literary colleagues

¹⁴ Cohn, “Sex and Death,” p. 705.

¹⁵ Cohn, “Sex and Death,” p. 709.

¹⁶ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin Books, 1992; first published, 1963), pp. 91-92.

engagement with psychoanalysis to be, at times, either inaccurate or confused.¹⁷ And yet, the encounter between literature and psychoanalysis continues to demonstrate that the relationship between the two fields is a particularly productive one.¹⁸

In the conclusion to her essay Cohn identifies two strategies that feminists must adopt in order to counter the influence of master discourses. She frames these two projects as “deconstructive” and “reconstructive.”¹⁹ The first step is to dismantle the dominance of the discourse, and the second, to pursue alternative possibilities; a strategy that echoes Michel Foucault’s work. For example, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault suggests that instead of entering into a dominant discourse in order to study its internal mechanisms, essentially in order to dismantle its operations, he argues that it is better to study a discourse in order to discover the problems that arise in the unities it presents.²⁰ He also argues that we, as theorists, must adopt a strategy in which we interrogate the links that are made and assumed, instead of building upon seemingly stable foundations.

The problem of renegotiation takes us to the second issue that Grosz’s essay raises. Her analysis of desire focuses specifically on whether “we can think beyond the logic of lack and acquisition, a logic that has rendered women the repositories, the passive receptacles of men’s needs, anxieties, and desires?”²¹ Here Grosz points

¹⁷ See also Jacques-Alain Miller, “The Analytic Experience: Means, Ends, and Results,” in *Lacan and the Subject of Language*, ed. by Ellie Ragland-Sullivan and Mark Bracher (New York: Routledge, 1991). The relationship between psychoanalysis and literature is developed further in the beginning of Chapter Two.

¹⁸ See also Shoshana Felman, “Turning the Screw of Interpretation,” in *Literature and Psychoanalysis The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, ed. by Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 94-207; Jane Gallop, *The Daughter’s Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

¹⁹ Cohn, “Sex and Death,” pp. 717-718.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 1997; translation first published, 1972), p. 26.

²¹ Grosz, “Refiguring Lesbian Desire,” pp. 69-70.

out that the job left for feminists is to figure psychoanalytic lack beyond a negative logic as well as beyond one that puts women's desires exclusively in relation to men's desires. One of the links that Grosz assumes however is between a psychoanalytic use of the term lack and the feminist use of the term. Her assertion that we, as feminists, need to think beyond the logic of lack and the way it renders women as men's receptacles omits the step taken between the location of lack in the female subject by psychoanalysis and how that lack functions within feminist projects. As a result, moving beyond the psychoanalytic inscription of lack is equated with the feminist project of liberation without a clear explanation of how the two come together. To put this in another way, Grosz's statement is of a kind that most feminists, myself included, would accept whether or not the link forged was entirely justified. There is a way in which feminist writers on desire and women's sexuality conflate terms that have a certain relevance to each other without fully developing how the relationship functions. Perhaps part of the reason is that fully explaining the terms can take away from the punch that a statement such as Grosz's delivers.

Taking the strategies suggested in these revisions into consideration, this chapter will examine the lack that is assigned to woman in psychoanalytic interpretations and the lack that is subsequently cited in feminist critiques. It will also argue that the renegotiation of lack is part of a wider feminist project that aims to re-address the phallogentric model of desire as theorised in psychoanalysis in order to understand female sexuality. This wider project never stands a chance of understanding female sexuality because it will always be understanding desire through the very logic that it opposes. In order to move forward from interpretations

of desire that posit woman as the receptacle of lack, it is necessary to cite these interpretations: to lay them out before taking them apart.

In doing so, however, I would like to distinguish this project from others that attempt to dismantle phallogentric logic in order to build a new logic in its place, in other words, I am wary of the 'reconstructive' end of Cohn's strategy. Reconstructive theory often reinscribes ideas such as 'desire' and 'woman' into an equally restrictive and singular logic, whether feminist or psychoanalytic. The underlying impulse in this methodology is to 'cure' or 'solve' the pathological logic (phallogentric) with a new improved one (feminist). For example, Juliet Mitchell's feminist reassessment of psychoanalysis in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* reconsiders the feminist engagement with psychoanalysis but does so in a way that perpetuates feminism's dependency on psychoanalysis to think through its own issues. In the 1999 introduction to her work, Mitchell praises Mari Jo Buhle's recent work on psychoanalysis and feminism²² because it demands that the "phallogentric model be remedied to understand female sexuality."²³ The term 'remedies' suggests that Buhle 'cures' the ailing phallogentric model of its symptoms by giving it a dose of good old feminism. In this example, feminism becomes the healing analyst of the poor, ailing psychoanalysis: she listens, advises, but ultimately she tells psychoanalysis 'this is what this means, this is how you must interpret this' and 'you are sick, I am your cure.' This textual 'curing' of psychoanalysis in feminist projects will be examined in this chapter as well as throughout this thesis.

²² Mari Jo Buhle, *Feminism and Its Discontents: A Century of Struggle with Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). Buhle's work provides her readers with an exhaustive and well researched analysis of the relationship between psychoanalysis and feminism.

²³ Juliet Mitchell, "Introduction, 1999," in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: A Radical Reassessment of Freudian Psychoanalysis* (London: Penguin Books, 2000; first published 1974), p. xxxii.

Mitchell's comment also suggests that psychoanalysis can be fixed in order to understand female sexuality, which means that she believes that by taking a second look at psychoanalysis we, as feminists, can reinterpret what is there in order to understand ourselves. This 'second look' shares some similarities to Luce Irigaray's and Hélène Cixous's work, both of which will be discussed later in this chapter. I will argue that this 'second look' is problematic in that it necessitates using psychoanalytic terms to understand or rather to re-understand female desire.

In order to examine the feminist reaction to psychoanalytic interpretations of 'lack' and 'woman,' it is necessary to analyse how these ideas circulate within psychoanalytic theory. To do so, I will address Freud's and Lacan's work, paying more attention to the latter as Lacan's work continues to have a stronger influence in feminist revisions of desire.

FREUD AND OEDIPUS

Freud's use of Oedipus continues to generate discussion and debate, whether in recent press or in new collections of feminist theory.²⁴ For example, in a recent collection entitled *Deleuze and Feminist Theory*, Claire Colebrook suggests that one way forward for feminist theory is to rethink Oedipus.²⁵ Why Oedipus? Perhaps one reason is because Freud's reading of Sophocles's myth continues to maintain a dominant influence in western culture and theory. Arising from a combination of

²⁴ For example, see also Paul Webster, "Blame the Parents not Oedipus, says Freud Critic," *The Observer*, 21 May 2000, World, p. 28.

²⁵ Claire Colebrook and Ian Buchanan, eds. *Deleuze and Feminist Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 13.

self-analysis and his case studies on infantile neuroses,²⁶ the Oedipus complex emerges as a unifying theory in Freudian psychoanalysis. In a letter to Wilhelm Fliess, Freud writes: "the Greek myth seizes on a compulsion which everyone recognises because he has felt traces of it in himself. Every member of the audience was once a budding Oedipus in phantasy, and this dream-fulfilment played out in reality causes everyone to recoil in horror, with the full measure of repression which separates his infantile from his present state."²⁷ Freud's letter reveals the way he connects his own personal experience with a universal experience. His reading of *Oedipus the King* draws together his theories on dream interpretation, wish fulfilment, repression and subjectivity into a master discourse on human sexuality.

In Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus is the "solver of riddles" who unwinds the tangled string of his own fate.²⁸ Oedipus's insistence on interpretation, on a cure or solution to the woes of his kingdom brings about his downfall. For in doing so, he not only reveals answers, but uncovers truths about his identity and sexuality: that he has killed his father, Laius and married his mother, Jocasta. Sophocles's text introduces the potentially destructive relationship between mother, father and son as well as the dangers of answering the unanswerable. As the concluding lines read: "It is dangerous to answer riddles, but some men are born to answer them. It is the gods' doing. They hide themselves in riddles. We must not try to understand too much."²⁹ Through his theorisation of the Oedipal complex, Freud

²⁶ Sigmund Freud, "Letter to Fliess, No. 71, 15 October 1897" in *The Origins of Psychoanalysis: Letter to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes: 1887-1902*, trans. Eric Mosbacher and James Strachey, ed. by Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud, and Ernst Kris (London: Imago Publishing Company Ltd, 1954), pp. 221-225; Freud and Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria*, trans. A. A. Brill (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950).

²⁷ Freud, "Letter to Fliess No. 71, 15 October 1897," *The Origins of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 223-224.

²⁸ Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, trans. Anthony Burgess (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1998; originally published 1972), p. 9.

²⁹ Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, p. 80.

becomes the 'solver of riddles' in terms of human sexuality and yet the way he solves these riddles become riddles in themselves.

For Freud, *Oedipus the King* dramatises the primal scene of desire and as such, the Oedipus complex becomes the underlying foundation of psychoanalytic interpretation.³⁰ He argues: "Every new arrival on this planet is faced by the task of mastering the Oedipus complex; anyone who fails to do so falls a victim to neurosis."³¹ 'Mastering' the Oedipus complex amounts to repressing desires for the mother and transferring them into an identification with the father, repressing these desires results in internalising them. In simpler terms, the Oedipus complex regulates the family constellation of mother, father and child, thus keeping the dynamics of sexuality and identification within the confines of the family.

The fact that Freud locates the origins of sexuality and subjectivity in the interplay between mother, father and child is one of the reasons that feminism finds such difficulties with the Oedipus complex. To establish lines of identification running to the father and those of desire to the mother, as Freud does in his theorisation of the Oedipal triangle, suggests that the father determines subjectivity and the mother, sexuality. In locating the dynamics within the confines of the family, Freud places emphasis on the distinct roles each family member must perform: the father maintains authority, the mother nurtures and the child learns from each.

In his essay entitled "The Dissolution of the Oedipal complex," Freud attempts to reassert the primacy of the Oedipal complex and its dissolution, otherwise

³⁰ Freud writes: "With the progress of psychoanalytic studies the importance of the Oedipus complex has become more and more clearly evident; its recognition has become the shibboleth that distinguishes the adherents of psychoanalysis from its opponents," *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin Books, 1991; first published in Penguin, 1977), pp. 149-50, footnote 1.

³¹ Freud, *On Sexuality*, p. 149, fnote 1.

known as the “castration complex,” in the wake of increasing interest in Otto Rank’s *The Trauma of Birth*.³² In the essay, Freud outlines the “painful disappointments”³³ that children must go through in order to ‘master’ the Oedipus complex and successfully move through the castration complex. He argues that: “The little girl likes to regard herself as what her father loves above all else; but the time comes when she has to endure a harsh punishment from him and she is cast out of her fool’s paradise. The boy regards his mother as his own property; but he finds one day that she has transferred her love and solicitude to a new arrival.”³⁴ It is important to note here that the “mastering” required by each child is of a different nature. The little girl must recognise that she is not the apple of her father’s eye, in other words, that she is not his object of desire. On the other hand, the boy needs to realise that he does not possess his mother, that she cannot be his object of desire. In this construction, the little girl learns she cannot *be* the object of desire and the boy learns he cannot *have* his object of desire. Already there is a difference in acquisition: the boy is disappointed by what he cannot *have* whereas the girl is disappointed by what she cannot *be*.

Freud argues that the “phallic phase” is happening at the same time as the Oedipal complex; the organ that moves the child from the Oedipal complex into his fear of castration is the penis. Freud suggests that initially the boy’s fixation on his penis leads him to masturbate. Because his parents, particularly his mother, are not approving of this act they tell him that if he continues to masturbate he will lose his penis. However, he does not recognise his fear of castration until he sees a little girl’s

³² Peter Gay, in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 661.

³³ Freud, *The Freud Reader*, p. 661.

³⁴ Freud, *The Freud Reader*, p. 661.

vagina. It is at this point, as Freud argues, that the little boy realises that the threats of castration are possible. The boy sees in the girl someone similar and yet differentiated by the lack of a penis.

Freud's theorisation of boys leads him to ask how girls develop out of the Oedipal complex. He argues that the little girl masturbates her clitoris which "behaves just like a penis to begin with."³⁵ She is content until she discovers the little boy's penis and recognises that she has "come off badly."³⁶ According to Freud, the little girl's recognition of her lack makes her feel inferior. In order to make up for this 'lack' she imagines that she will eventually grow a penis like a boy's. After a while she realises that this will not happen and transfers her desires for a penis into the desire to have her father's child. Eventually she gives up on this desire too and dissolves the Oedipus complex. Although Freud acknowledges that his theory on female castration is imprecise and inadequate³⁷ it is nevertheless elaborated on by Jacques Lacan, as will be discussed later.

Freud's theorisation of the Oedipal complex and its dissolution known as the castration complex is fundamental to the way psychoanalysis locates sexual difference in the operation of the genitals. Woman becomes lack because the little boy does not see anything where the penis should be. This 'missing' penis characterises her as negative, empty, and void. For Freud, this difference is a result of biology or anatomy and it is a 'truth' that factors within his theorisation of the Oedipal and castration complexes.

In her feminist polemic, *The Female Eunuch*, Germaine Greer approaches the

³⁵ Freud, *The Freud Reader*, p. 665.

³⁶ Freud, *The Freud Reader*, p. 665.

³⁷ Freud, *The Freud Reader*, p. 665.

'truths' that Freud claims for the castration complex with characteristic flair, stating: "This must be nonsense."³⁸ Although Freud's ideas may seem ridiculous or may in fact be "nonsense," as Greer suggests, they still maintain a hold over literary and cultural readings of subjectivity, sexuality and, important to this thesis, desire. In citing Greer's reaction, I am also suggesting that there has been little progress in feminist criticism since the 70's that has managed to substantiate this claim for "nonsense." Criticism has not enabled us, as feminists, to think around the way Freud positions woman in his theorisation of sexuality. Subsequent theories, such as Irigaray's or Cixous's, do not suggest that Freud's work is "nonsense;" rather they suggest he is wrong when it comes to women, or, as Irigaray argues, that he has a "blind spot"³⁹ when it comes to recognising what woman has. To return to Jackson's and Scott's claim that there are no "viable alternatives" it appears that this is largely because critics find it difficult to validate a claim for "nonsense" or to move beyond a cultural belief that at the centre of Freud's theories there is some validity.

The way in which Freud has been enculturated in western society and Lacan in critical theory makes it difficult, if not impossible, to negotiate terms like 'desire' and 'woman' without acknowledging the ways in which these theories work and have been adopted by other theorists. Before considering this point further, I will discuss the ways in which Jacques Lacan privileges the castration complex in his revision of Freudian psychoanalysis in order to give primacy to the phallus as well as to the location of lack in female sexuality.

³⁸ Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: Flamingo, 1999; first published, 1970), p. 105.

³⁹ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1985); Irigaray's chapter on Freud's work is entitled "The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry."

LACAN AND HAMLET

In his critical study of Lacan, Malcolm Bowie suggests that Lacan's work on Freud could be framed in the following ways: "either as an attempt to be uncommonly faithful to the letter of the original texts, or as a simple catch-phrase designed to disguise an entirely different purpose – that of building a new psychoanalysis to rival Freud's own."⁴⁰ It is likely that Lacan falls somewhere between these two positions: between being faithful to Freud and forging his own psychoanalysis complete with his own disciples. One of the most important ways in which Lacan differentiates his work from Freud's is through his attention to the signifying chains in language. Building on Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theories, Lacan states that the "unconscious is structured like a language"⁴¹ and in so doing, he differentiates his project from Freud's by locating the fundamental processes of psychoanalysis in language. As Bowie writes: "what Lacan is in fact doing is mapping out for himself, by an inventive re-use of Saussurean diction, a distinctive conceptual landscape in which these divergent accounts of language can be dialectically counterposed."⁴² Lacan's attention to language marks his 'new' approach to psychoanalysis and yet many of the conclusions Freud reaches, particularly regarding woman, remain as 'truth' in Lacan's revision.

Lacan engages with Freud's Oedipus complex in a way that makes it difficult to understand exactly how he understands Oedipus and how he uses it to privilege his own theorisation of the castration complex. Shoshana Felman notes this ambiguity in

⁴⁰ Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan* (London: Fontana Press, 1991), p. 158. Bowie is referring here to Lacan's work up to the early 60's.

⁴¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (London: Penguin, 1994; first translation published, 1977), p. 203.

⁴² Bowie, *Lacan*, p. 65.

her analysis of Lacan's use of Oedipus. She claims: "Nowhere in Lacan's writing is there any systematic exposition of his specific understanding of the significance of Oedipus."⁴³ I include Felman's quote not only to substantiate my own reading of Lacan, but to highlight Felman's use of the phrase "systematic exposition" as it implies that although Lacan does engage and revise Freud, he does not do so in a straightforward and clear manner. The absence of a direct link between Freud and Lacan in Lacan's work is not surprising. At best Lacan's textual elusiveness can be read as a way of explicating his theoretical arguments, at worst as a way of keeping his reader from ever truly recognising its theoretical faults. The fact that Lacan does not directly engage with the Oedipus complex can be read in connection with his intent to move away from the importance Freud gives the Oedipal theory in order to assert his own theories on the phallus and on the castration complex.

In order to explain Lacan's theory on desire further, I will focus on his essay entitled, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*," as it provides a good, concise example of Lacan's theories on the phallus and castration as well as an example of his enigmatic style. The essay exemplifies the way Lacan revises Freud in order to dismantle the primacy of Oedipus and assert the importance of the castration complex and the phallus as the prime signifier. Lacan privileges his reading of castration over Freud's oedipalisation and in doing so, he situates punishment or lack at the forefront of the exchange in desire. Lacan maintains that Hamlet's lack of ability to act on his own desires is at the root of Shakespeare's tragedy. He suggests that Hamlet loses his way in desire because he does not know what he wants.

⁴³ Shoshana Felman, *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight: Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 102.

Lacan's choice of *Hamlet* may derive from the reference Freud makes to *Hamlet* in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In a footnote, Freud briefly compares Oedipus to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, noting that: "Hamlet can do anything – except take revenge on the man who removed his father and took the latter's place beside his mother, the man who shows him his own repressed infant wishes realised."⁴⁴ Whereas Freud focuses his interpretation on Hamlet's relationship to his parents, that he should revenge his father but he is too busy suppressing desires for his mother, Lacan focuses on the way Hamlet loses his desire,⁴⁵ and how doing so undermines his ability to enact revenge. Lacan makes several comparisons between *Oedipus* and *Hamlet*, noting the similarities and differences in their plot structure. Most importantly, he notes that each narrative begins with the crime of patricide, he writes: "For Freud, the primal murder of the father forms the ultimate horizon of the problem of origins. Note, too, that he finds it relevant for every psychoanalytic issue, and he never considers a discussion closed until it is brought in."⁴⁶ Here Lacan alludes to Freud's over use of the Oedipal complex. He suggests that Freud drags in the Oedipal theory whenever he can without considering whether or not it directly relates to the issues at hand. However, Lacan's observation does more than imply Freud's insistence on the Oedipus complex; it also suggests that Freud's dependence on the Oedipal complex causes him to overlook a more important horizon: that of the castration complex. In asserting his own reading over Freud's it is fitting that Lacan

⁴⁴ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. Joyce Crick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 204, footnote 23; Freud also mentions Hamlet in his *Letter to Fliess*, No. 71, he writes: "I am not thinking of Shakespeare's conscious intentions, but supposing rather that he was impelled to write [*Hamlet*] by a real event because his own unconscious understood that of his hero," *The Origins of Psychoanalysis*, p. 224.

⁴⁵ Jacques Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*," in *Literature and Psychoanalysis The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, ed. by Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 11-52, (p. 12).

⁴⁶ Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*," p.42.

chooses the story of a prince that struggles with finding a way to assert his authority after the death of his father.

Lacan's interpretation of *Hamlet* is difficult to follow for any reader who is unfamiliar with Lacanian psychoanalysis. As Lacan tells his readers: "This may seem a bit abstract to those who have not accompanied us along the road that has led up to this point."⁴⁷ The narrative structure of *Hamlet* serves as a loose framework for Lacan to explicate some of the most fundamental concepts in psychoanalysis, particularly those that directly affect the movement of desire, such as the 'Other,' *objet a* and the role of the Phallus. Lacan broadly argues that Hamlet is caught between avenging his father's murder and envying Claudius. At the centre of this tension is Hamlet's desire for his mother. Lacan reads Gertrude as Hamlet's 'Other,' the "primordial subject of the demand."⁴⁸ Because Hamlet desires his mother he cannot choose between his feelings of revenge and jealousy. However, unlike Freud's interpretation of Sophocles's *Oedipus*, Lacan does not 'blame' Hamlet for his repressed feelings; rather he suggests that Gertrude's own desires for Claudius keep Hamlet from going through the castration complex and subsequently from knowing what he wants.

In her reading of Lacan's essay in *Speaking Desires can be Dangerous*, Elizabeth Wright suggests that the emphasis Lacan places on Gertrude marks a different reading of the Oedipal drama from Freud's. Instead of focusing on Hamlet's repressed desires and his inability to let them go, Lacan places the 'blame' on Gertrude. As Wright suggests: "The (m)Other is showing no lack, and this is the essential cause of Hamlet's inability to act. He cannot conclude the Oedipal

⁴⁷ Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*," p. 15.

⁴⁸ Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*," p. 12

journey.”⁴⁹ Wright’s analysis argues that Gertrude’s failure to expose herself as lacking undermines Hamlet’s success. Hamlet’s desires are privileged over his (m)other’s desires. In this way, Lacan does differentiate his reading of *Hamlet* from Freud’s; however, he still maintains that a woman must embody lack; that is, she must strive to *be* the phallus whereas man must strive to *have* the phallus

Lacan’s reading maintains that Hamlet’s dependence on the ‘Other,’ Gertrude, makes up the drama of the play. Hamlet is always acting “at the hour of the Other,”⁵⁰ that is, he is always arriving too late at any final decision of what he should do. The ‘Other’ is supposed to help the subject articulate what it is s/he wants. As Lacan argues in *Écrits*: “That is why the question of the Other, which comes back to the subject from the place from which he expects an oracular reply in some such form as ‘*Che Vuoi?*’, ‘What do you Want?’,’ is the one that best leads him to the path of his own desire – providing he sets out, with the help of the skills of a partner known as a psychoanalyst, to reformulate it, even without knowing it, as ‘What does he want of me?’”⁵¹ Lacan’s suggests that Hamlet is unable to ask his mother what it is she wants and therefore is unable to take the appropriate action. The ‘Other’ holds the key to desire, which is always fading away, unattainable and out of reach.

O PHALLUS

Crucial to Lacan’s interpretation of Hamlet’s desire is his stress on the role of

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Wright, *Speaking Desires Can be Dangerous: The Poetics of the Unconscious* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999), p. 84.

⁵⁰ Lacan, “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*,” p. 19.

⁵¹ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1977), p. 312.

the phallus.⁵² In his essay, the "Signification of the Phallus," Lacan clearly states that the phallus is to be understood as a signifier, not as a fantasy, an object, or even less as an organ.⁵³ As he argues: "For the phallus is a signifier, a signifier whose function, in the intrasubjective economy of the analysis, lifts the veil perhaps from the function it performed in the mysteries."⁵⁴ Although Lacan's reader may be initially comforted by the definite terms he uses in defining the phallus, s/he will soon find him/herself on slippery grounds again. For Lacan, the phallus is the primary signifier in the movement of desire. As he writes: "What is it that the subject is deprived of? The phallus; and it is from the phallus that the object gets its function in the fantasy, and from the phallus that desire is constituted with the fantasy as its reference."⁵⁵ The phallus as signifier stands in for the impossible limit of desire. Desire in Lacanian terms is a defence against the repressed desires of incest mastered during the Oedipal and castration complexes. The child's repression of desires for mother/father is signified by the phallus; the phallus stands in where those desires are repressed. However, the phallus is not visible, it is signified through language and engaged with through the child's entrance into his/her exchange with the Symbolic and Imaginary.

Lacan argues that the subject is deprived of the phallus, and so, arising from this lack, the subject imagines an object in the place where the phallus is veiled. Lacan terms this fantasy the *objet a*. The *objet a* stands in for the phallus and structures desire in a similar way by acting as an end-point or limit for the subject's

⁵² See also Jacques Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus," *Ecrits: A Selection*, pp. 281-291. For further criticism of the role of the phallus in Lacan's interpretation of desire, see also Bowie, "The Meaning of the Phallus," *Lacan*, pp. 122-157; Belsey, "Desire in Theory: Freud, Lacan, Derrida," *Desire*, pp. 42-71.

⁵³ Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus," *Ecrits: A Selection*, p. 285.

⁵⁴ Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus," *Ecrits: A Selection*, p. 285.

⁵⁵ Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*," p. 15.

desires. In his essay on *Hamlet*, Lacan draws a connection between Ophelia and “O Phallos,” although he acknowledges that this kind of name play does not make for good criticism.⁵⁶ Lacan interprets Ophelia as Hamlet’s “bait”⁵⁷ and argues that she represents the *objet a*. He suggests that Hamlet loses the way of his desire partly because he does not take the “bait,” or Ophelia. As Hamlet’s madness spirals, he loses sight of Ophelia and of his relation to her in desire. She is no longer an object of desire for him, as Lacan writes: “In short, what is taking place here is the destruction and loss of the object.”⁵⁸

Lacan argues that it is not until Ophelia has killed herself that she can resume her role as Hamlet’s *objet a*. When Hamlet and Laertes meet at the scene of Ophelia’s grave, Hamlet engages Laertes in a struggle which Lacan notes is more charged and aggressive than the final duel scene. Lacan argues that this is because Hamlet competes with Laertes over the position of mourner for Ophelia.⁵⁹ Hamlet, safe in the knowledge that Ophelia is dead, can now desire her as his ideal object. In this way, Ophelia can resume her role as the ‘bait’ dangling in front of the male subject and take the blame for whether or not he decides to ‘bite.’ Her role may be read by some as pivotal in that she determines the fate of the desiring subject, yet as “bait” she is consigned to playing the object in a masculine economy. She is successful only insofar as she functions in the realisation of Hamlet’s desires, not her own.

Lacan’s reading of *Hamlet* ultimately situates woman as the cause of

⁵⁶ Lacan, “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*,” p. 20.

⁵⁷ Lacan, “As a sort of come-on, I announced that I would speak today about that piece of bait named Ophelia, and I’ll be as good as my word.” “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*,” p. 11.

⁵⁸ Lacan, “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*,” 23; see also Lacan, *Écrit: A Selection*, p. 58.

⁵⁹ See also Wright’s analysis of mourning and desire in her reading of Lacan’s essay on *Hamlet*, *Speaking Desires can be Dangerous*, pp. 77-85.

Hamlet's confusion and of his inability to rise to his rightful seat. Although Lacan may move away from Freud's understanding of anatomy as destiny in terms of sexual difference, he still concludes that woman is lacking or rather, she must be lacking in the movement of desire. As Jacqueline Rose argues in *Feminine Sexuality*, for Lacan it is "not that anatomical difference *is* sexual difference (the one as strictly deducible from the other), but that anatomical difference comes to *figure* sexual difference, that is, become the sole representative of what that difference is allowed to be."⁶⁰ Lacan positioning of Gertrude and Ophelia as 'Other' and 'objet a' to the subject Hamlet supports the paradigm Freud raises in his theorisation of the 'castration complex.' The girl must want to *be* the phallus, that is, she must strive to be like the phallus, whereas the boy must want to *have* the phallus, in other words, he must try to possess his object of desire. Although Lacan moves away from the 'truths' of anatomy, he only does so in order to situate them in language.

LACAN AND THE QUESTION OF WOMAN

Lacan's approach to the question of woman, which Freud admits to knowing very little, is specifically addressed in *Encore*. In this text, one that continues to have many feminist theorists justifiably upset, Lacan takes on the question of woman. As he tells his readers: "What I am working on this year is what Freud expressly left aside: *Was will das Weib?* What does Woman want?"⁶¹ It is fitting that Lacan's return to Freud's question of woman is framed in the notion of an 'encore' for it is surely an

⁶⁰ Jacqueline Rose, "Introduction II," in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*, ed. by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (New York: Norton, 1985), p. 42 as quoted by Elam in *Feminism and Deconstruction*, p. 48.

⁶¹ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, On Feminine Sexuality The Limits of Love and Knowledge, Book XX, Encore 1972-1973*, trans. Bruce Fink, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998), p. 80. Subsequent references will appear in the text.

area of research and inquiry that Freud left the stage too early to answer. Lacan refers to the title both as an acknowledgement that he is “still here”⁶² and as an example of the way love demands love: “[Love] never stops (*ne cesse pas*) demanding [love]. It demands it . . . *encore*. ‘*Encore*’ is the proper name of the gap (*faille*) in the Other from which the demand for love stems” (4). One should not overlook the dual significance in Lacan’s title. ‘Encore,’ French for ‘still,’ not only refers to Lacan’s continuing and dominant presence in the psychoanalytic community, but the demand, ‘encore,’ for a repeat performance: his. It is also reflective of the way in which Lacan’s disciples show him love and demand that love over and over again.⁶³

In *Encore*, Lacan asserts that “*woman* does not exist,” (7) a statement which re-appears at the centre of most feminist critiques of *Encore*. Lacan writes: “There’s no such thing as Woman, Woman with a capital *W* indicating the universal. There’s no such thing as Woman because, in her essence [. . .] she is not-whole” (72-73). Lacan continues to refer to the ‘non-existent’ woman as “not-whole” in other places in the text; in fact he claims that their elaboration is the true subject behind *Encore* (57). He argues that “Regarding female sexuality, our colleagues, the lady analysts, do *not* tell us . . . the *whole* story! (*pas tout!*), It’s quite striking. They haven’t contributed one iota to the question of feminine sexuality” (57-58). Lacan’s italicised emphasis on ‘not’ and ‘whole’ underline his choice of “not whole” to describe woman and yet he does not justify his claim that women have contributed nothing to

⁶² Lacan, *Encore*, p. 1. He plays with the French definition, ‘still.’

⁶³ For further criticism of Lacan and his psychoanalytic reception, see Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan and Co.: A History of Psychoanalysis in France 1925-1985*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (London: Free Association Books, 1990); David Macey, *Lacan in Context* (London: Verso, 1988).

the study of female sexuality; a fallacious claim which can only be read as a kind of theoretical bait, an invitation for the later criticism and uproar it produces.⁶⁴

It is important here not to confuse Lacan's assertion that there is no universal woman, or no essence to woman with feminist projects that resist essentialising the category of woman. Although they appear theoretically similar, they are not the same. Lacan equates woman with pre-discursive lack, that is, he argues that Woman (with a capital W) cannot be represented in language. Although feminist projects that seek to eliminate reductive definitions of woman may carry with them similar resistances to representing woman, they are not relegating her to an abstract beyond or to a place that she is barred from entering, as Lacan does. Feminism is a political movement and as such may resist representing a definitive *woman* only insofar as one image of a woman can not incorporate the multiplicity of women in its structure. Lacan, on the other hand, understands woman in relation to his theorisation of the phallus.

The question that underlines the question of woman for Lacan is how does a woman experience sexual ecstasy. Lacan is sure that women experience an enjoyment similar to men but he is determined that it is unspeakable and un-representable. He argues that woman experiences a "supplementary" (73) *jouissance* to man's experience of *jouissance*, a "feminine *jouissance*" (77) that belongs to woman only and yet does not signify anything, nor does it exist (74). That is, she knows that it happens (although he suggests that it only happens to some), but she is unable to know what it means or to speak about it (74). To elaborate on this point, Lacan refers his readers to Bernini's statue of Saint Teresa: "you need to go to Rome and see the

⁶⁴ Lacan writes in *Encore*: "Perhaps it wasn't entirely about me that people were speaking when they said that, according to me, ladies don't exist, but it certainly wasn't what I had just said" (61) as if to play with the claims he makes and the meaning that is made of them. Here he has substituted 'woman' with 'ladies' which changes the original statement entirely.

statue by Bernini [“The Ecstasy of St. Teresa”] to immediately understand that she’s coming. There’s no doubt about it. What is she getting off on? It is clear that the essential testimony of the mystics consists in saying that they experience it, but know nothing about it” (76). Placing the emphasis on what she is ‘getting off on’ returns the focus onto the operation of the genitals. In a sense what Lacan asks is *how* (not what) is she getting off without a penis/phallus. The implicit suggestion in Lacan’s observation is that women are not able to knowingly stimulate their own bodies to reach orgasm: they ‘know nothing about it’ (‘it’ referring to orgasm).

In his description of the statue Lacan implies that woman knows nothing, at least nothing that she can fully understand about pleasuring herself. But this is true only insofar as her knowledge and desire are linked to the signification of the phallus. Under the signifying structure of the phallus, women and men are barred from fully knowing and understanding the dynamics of *jouissance*. Lacan’s refusal to allow men as well as women access to the hidden knowledge of the phallus can be read as a progressive or equitable move forward. And yet, his denial of sexual difference in language (‘there is no sexual relationship’ (35)) combined with his insistence that woman “does not exist,” problematise his relationship to feminist theory, as French feminists Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous demonstrate.

THE FEMINIST RESPONSE PART ONE

Given the contentions made by Freud and Lacan, such as Lacan’s “woman does not exist,” it is not surprising that their theories have generated debate amongst feminist theorists. Among the more well known are French feminists Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous. In the second part of this chapter I will examine the way Irigaray

and Cixous approach the theoretical position Freud and Lacan take with regard to "lack."

IRIGARAY

In 1974, the same year that Juliet Mitchell publishes *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, Luce Irigaray publishes *Speculum of the Other Woman*, a critical look at female sexuality from Freud to Plato. *Speculum* directly challenges the discursive dominance of a masculine history of ideas. Irigaray begins with Freud and his "blind spot" of female sexuality and ends with Plato. She reverses the chronological progression in order to question a masculine framework of ideas. She explains this methodology as an attempt to upset a phallogentric order and yet admits that doing so does not allow the question of woman to be answered.⁶⁵

Not long after the publication of *Speculum*, Irigaray is fired from her teaching position in the Department of Psychoanalysis of Vincennes University and expelled from the Freudian school. Although there are always other possible reasons, Irigaray's dismissal appears related to the publication of *Speculum* because her work directly challenges Freud's and Lacan's views on female desire. In her essay appropriately entitled, "Women's exile,"⁶⁶ she writes: "The meaning of this expulsion is clear: only men may say what female pleasure consists of. Woman are not allowed to speak, otherwise they challenge the monopoly of discourse and of theory exerted by men."⁶⁷ The discursive dominance of masculine ideas is at the

⁶⁵ Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 68. Subsequent references will appear in the text.

⁶⁶ In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray claims that woman is an exile from the/her economy of desire, p. 43.

⁶⁷ Irigaray, "Women's Exile," Interview with Luce Irigaray, trans. Couze Venn, in *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*, ed. by Deborah Cameron (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 80-96, (p. 91).

forefront of Irigaray's project and is perceived as the greatest threat to the articulation of women's desires.

Irigaray's work involves reframing and rewriting psychoanalytic interpretations of female desire as well as stressing the fundamental importance of sexual difference. Her questions are well considered and help to draw out the integral debates between psychoanalysis and feminism. However, these questions also expose the inherent contradictions in Irigaray's argument which are symptomatic of the larger difficulties in feminist attempts to refigure psychoanalytic interpretations of women's desire. For example, in *This Sex Which is Not One*, a more localised attack on psychoanalysis, Irigaray asks: "Must we go over this ground one more time?" (69) referring to the sacred ground of psychoanalysis. Her question is an essential one to ask as well as to answer. However, in order to do so Irigaray takes 'another look' at psychoanalysis which inscribes her argument into a psychoanalytic framework. For this reason, her answer becomes a 'yes' by default.

In *This Sex Which is Not One*, Irigaray addresses the lack that psychoanalysis equates with woman. She asks "So woman does not have a sex organ?" (28) and answers that they have at least two: two lips that touch each other without any external help. Using the metaphor of 'two lips,' or as a metaphor for metonymy as one critic suggests,⁶⁸ Irigaray stresses that woman's sexuality is not only double, but *plural* (28). Irigaray's 'another look' at psychoanalysis draws her readers attention to the 'truth' psychoanalysis gives to anatomy insofar as it determines sexual difference. Offering another reading, of woman's genitals as two lips instead of as

⁶⁸ See also Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 66.

lack, offers an alternative to the psychoanalytic interpretation.⁶⁹ In doing so, she challenges the psychoanalytic claim of “anatomy as an irrefutable criterion of truth” (70-71) and offers an image to replace the lack assigned to women in psychoanalytic readings. However, in order to posit this alternative image she draws attention to the importance of the genitals in desire and sexual difference. Offering “two lips” instead of a lack does not necessarily refigure the importance psychoanalysis gives to the operation of the genitals; it just replaces one image with another. The fact that psychoanalytic theory sees lack and Irigaray’s second look finds plurality still means that the genitals are determining women’s relation to desire. In other words, Irigaray does not suggest that psychoanalysis is mistaken or ‘wrong;’ rather she implies that they have missed what *is* there.

Although Irigaray reconceives woman as lacking or repressed and instead imagines her as multiple, her refiguring is predicated on an essentialised version of woman that may be as restricting as the models psychoanalysis offer. Whether Irigaray’s work essentialises woman or does not dominates most of the recent criticism on her writing.⁷⁰ Although I cannot do justice to all the competing arguments for or against claims that Irigaray’s work essentialises woman, I would like to cite one essay that demonstrates some of the key issues in the debate. In “Irigaray Through the Looking Glass,” Carolyn Burke argues that Irigaray’s theories are largely formulated in response and in reaction to her rejection of Freud and

⁶⁹ For an extensive analysis of Irigaray’s theory on ‘two lips,’ see also Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.170-175; Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*, pp. 62-66.

⁷⁰ See also Carolyn Burke, “Irigaray Through the Looking Glass,” in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. by Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 37-56; Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*; Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Criticism* (New York: Methuen, 1985).

Lacan. Because her ideas are structured by those she opposes, she runs the risk of reinscribing Lacan's (and Freud's) concepts into her own alternative. Burke also suggests that this phenomenon could be interpreted as representing a father-daughter relationship between psychoanalysis and feminism. She argues: "Lacan is like the paterfamilias of the psychoanalytic family who refuses to acknowledge the independent wisdom of his daughters. The daughter, in turn, seeks a way out of her overdetermined transference to this rejecting father-lover by turning upon the terms of her allegiance."⁷¹

Although I agree with Burke's initial suggestion that Irigaray reinscribes her theories within those she opposes, I disagree with Burke's analysis that this dynamic is linked to a father-daughter transference. It is important to note here that Burke is finding fault or lack in Irigaray's argument by inscribing her analysis in psychoanalytical processes. On the one hand the metaphor of father-daughter can be considered fitting since Irigaray's return to psychoanalytic theories, such as the castration complex, do circumscribe her own attempts at alternatives within its framework. In this way, Irigaray does become linked with a psychoanalytic 'family.' However, to situate the dynamics involved in confronting a dominant discourse within the confines of the family reduces Irigaray's attempt to find alternatives to the rebellious and misguided antics of a teenager. Burke's suggestion of Lacan as father-lover and Irigaray as daughter highlights the very familial dynamic that undermines the possibility of liberating desire from the dominant influence of psychoanalysis because it keeps her efforts under the constellation of the Oedipal complex. To use Irigaray own words: "Indeed, in [Freud's] view, woman never truly escapes from the

⁷¹ Burke, "Irigaray Through the Looking Glass," p. 41; See also Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction*.

Oedipal complex. She remains forever fixated on the desire for the father, remains subject to the father and to his law, for fear of losing his love, which is the only thing capable of giving her any value at all" (87). Burke's essay which proposes a feminist psychoanalysis of Irigaray's feminist alternative to psychoanalysis should make clear the ways in which these two fields are inextricably linked to each other. This example should also draw attention to the many difficulties and possibilities the encounter between psychoanalysis and feminism produces.

One possibility to consider in Irigaray's reassessment of psychoanalysis is her examination of psychoanalytic discourse. In *This Sex Which is Not One*, she argues that although Freud focuses on sexuality he does not construct an interpretation of the way discourse is sexualised (73). Her attention to the sexualised discourse of psychoanalysis leads her to examine alternative ways of dealing with the phallogentric dominance of psychoanalysis. She suggests that possibilities lie in introducing women's writing into the dominant discourse and in destroying the discursive tools that give men mastery. In particular, Irigaray suggests that mimicry, a role historically assigned to the feminine, is a possible 'way out' for women that would allow them to recover the place of their subordination without being reduced to it.

In her essay, "Cosi Fan Tutti," in *This Sex Which is Not One*, Irigaray takes up Lacan's position in *Encore* specifically. She patches together quotes from *Encore* with her own responses which produce a montage of psychoanalytic and feminist ideas. Only one footnote appears in the beginning of the essay which explains that the quoted passages throughout the essay come from Lacan's *Encore*.⁷² For this

⁷² See also Burke, "Irigaray Through the Looking Glass," p. 46; Elizabeth Weed, "The Question of Style," *Engaging with Irigaray*, pp. 79-109.

reason, her reader may find it difficult to separate Irigaray's thoughts from Lacan's. Instead of addressing Lacan's theories in a literary sense, she fuses her work to his and his to hers which gives her reader a sense of how mimicry can function in feminist criticism of psychoanalysis.

Irigaray begins her essay by criticising psychoanalysis for its monosexual and monological discourse. She argues that psychoanalysis insists that there is only one way of representing sexuality and that is through the signification of the phallus. Irigaray turns to look at Lacan's *Encore* because, as mentioned earlier, he focuses on the question of woman, and because Lacan's use of linguistics distinguishes his project from Freud's emphasis on the operation of the genitals. Lacan moves away from Freud's biological account of difference in order to focus on how sexual difference is represented in language.

Although Lacan differentiates his project from Freud's by locating difference in language, Irigaray argues that he still maintains the monologic view that does not allow women to articulate their own desires. In order to substantiate her claim, she refers to Lacan's reference to the statue of St. Teresa and writes: "In Rome? So far away? To look? At a statue? Of a saint? Sculpted by a man? What pleasure are we talking about? Whose pleasure? [. . .] But how can one 'read' them when one is a 'man'? The production of ejaculations of all sorts, often prematurely emitted, makes him miss, in the desire for identification with the lady, what her own pleasure might be all about. And. . . his?" (91). Irigaray astutely notes the way Lacan appropriates and names the pleasure of a woman who literally has no voice, nor subject to speak of. She also counters his references to female orgasm ("she's coming") with a ridiculing allusion to premature ejaculation. However her question, "But how can

one 'read' them (women) when one is a 'man'?" suggests not only that women's discourse and experience solely belong to women but also the opposite, that male discourse and experience solely belongs to men. By arguing that men cannot understand women and have no right to do so, one must also agree that women do not understand men and have no right to try. This paradigm also suggests that there is an essential 'man' and 'woman.' Unfortunately, Irigaray's counter claims against Lacan put her in danger of repeating the very logic she confronts with tenacity and determination. Her desire to construct an alternative conception of women's desire runs into the same problems of singularity and restriction that she attempts to combat in psychoanalytic discourse. Although the process of rewriting may capture Irigaray's alternative insights within its framework, the bravado in which she writes offer readers an example of the style and strength necessary to counter the dominance of psychoanalytic interpretations.

HÉLÈNE CIXOUS

Hélène Cixous's work continues to have a monumental impact on feminist theory, both in Europe and in America. Because the scope of this project can not adequately deal with the breadth of Cixous's work, I will focus on three aspects of her work in particular that I feel elucidate the psychoanalytic use of lack in desire as well as posit alternative ways of interpreting female desire. Firstly, Cixous encourages women to write their own stories, to voice their own desires. Her call to writing can be viewed as similar to Irigaray's insistence that women find a way to dismantle the discursive dominance of a phallogentric order. However, Cixous differentiates her project by suggesting that by writing women will remove

themselves from a place of silence.⁷³ Cixous does not define what this feminine practice of writing is or should be, rather she gestures towards what it could be. As Verena Andermatt Conley writes in her critical study of Cixous: “Cixous herself performs in relation to texts what she invites the reader to do, that is, to *accompany* her, remark certain terms, follow turns, and risk new formulations.”⁷⁴ Cixous’s writing is celebratory and poetic: “We, coming early to culture, repressed and choked by it, our beautiful mouths, stopped up with gags, pollen, and short breaths; we the labyrinths, we the ladders, we the trampled spaces; the stolen and the flights – we are ‘black’ *and* we are beautiful” (69). Woman in Cixous’s loving hands is both victim to a phallogentric order and yet capable of toppling it over with her dark and mysterious forces. Cixous reclaims the binary opposites that masculine logic has confined women within, celebrating their positive and productive energies.

The other concept Cixous puts forward is a reframing of ‘bisexuality.’ Cixous theorises bisexuality as the presence of both sexes in one body: masculine and feminine. Starting from the genitals she imagines this plurality extending to every other part of the body: “the multiplication of the effects of desire’s inscription on every part of the body and the other body” (85). The plurality that Cixous’s imagines can be likened to Irigaray’s theorisation of the “two lips,” although Cixous’s example suggests that desire can be found all over the body as opposed to localised in the genitals.

Drawing on the psychoanalytic interpretation that women want to *be* the phallus, Cixous argues that this puts woman in a better position than man to

⁷³ Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 93. Subsequent references will appear in the text.

⁷⁴ Verena Andermatt Conley, *Hélène Cixous* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. xiv.

experience and realise this form of bisexuality. Man, busy with his desire to possess the phallus and afraid of castration or of being feminine, is disadvantaged in Cixous's refiguring. In this example, as well as in others, Cixous takes the negative inscriptions that psychoanalysis gives to woman and looks at them in a positive and productive way. To cite another example, Cixous takes the suggestion that woman is supposed to become the Other in the movement of desire and argues that this admission (of the Other) is what allows her a way to love herself and to write about that self-love.

Although these re-interpretations are positive and productive within feminist theorisation of psychoanalysis, they position woman at times above and beyond man. Cixous lifts woman up to a place that is cosmic and without boundaries, unlike her male counterpoint. For example, in *The Newly Born Woman*, she counters Lacan's assertion that woman is "not-whole" by suggesting that she has an "endless body, without 'end,' without principal 'parts;,' if she is a whole, it is a whole made up of parts that are wholes, not simple, partial objects but varied entirety, moving and boundless change, a cosmos where Eros never stops travelling, vast astral space" (87). Whilst Cixous's work is a necessary deconstruction of the oppositions erected by phallo-centered discourse, her writing also reifies these oppositions and creates a category of 'woman,' a definition of 'woman,' that does impose limits, even in their limitlessness, and certainly essentialises. To follow Cixous's call for desire as life affirming against the psychoanalytic (mis)interpretations of desire as lack only returns the logic back to where it first originates, with psychoanalysis. Although Cixous's arguments cast light on some of the dark shadows psychoanalysis draws on female sexuality it does so at the expense of male sexuality. Moreover, even for

women Cixous's terms can be constricting and limiting, for not all women possess or want to possess the cosmic fluidity that Cixous imagines.

Despite the difficulties Cixous's alternative theorisation runs into, her theories also present possibilities that deserve further consideration. For instance, in *The Newly Born Woman*, Catherine Clément and Hélène Cixous suggest a therapeutic if not revolutionary power exists in the ability to laugh. Clément alludes to the power of laughter, a hysteric's laugh, in her rendering of guilt: "All laughter is allied with the monstrous [...] Laughter breaks up, breaks out, splashes over" (33). Cixous elaborates and extends Clément's suggestion to incorporate Medusa's image: "All you have to do to see the Medusa is look her in the face: and she isn't deadly. She is beautiful and she laughs" (69). The image Cixous offers is seductive as well as powerful. The frightening face of Medusa with her hair of snakes and her stony stare is transformed into a laughing, mobile figure of feminine joy. Cixous's "laugh of the Medusa" not only demonstrates the eloquence of her prose but the power of myths to keep us from looking in certain places or from staring too long into the eyes of the dark, feminine for fear that she will turn us to stone.

"Sorties," Cixous's half of *The Newly Born Woman* takes these myths to task, undoing and unravelling the fantastical power they have over our cultural imaginations. Motivating her critique of myths is one of the most pervasive and influential myth of all: Oedipus. Although she does not directly deal with the Oedipal myth, she does deal with the castration complex, which is the dissolution of the Oedipal complex. She challenges the myths by suggesting that we, as feminists, should be able to laugh at their ridiculousness, although she acknowledges that their continuing presence makes it difficult to do so: "We have been frozen in our place

between two terrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss. It would be enough to make half the world break out laughing, if it were not still going on" (68).

For Irigaray and Cixous, woman is cosmic, open, multiple and without boundaries. Her language is also understood in these terms: without limits, multi-layered, and essentially different from man's. In short, they revise woman as the opposite of what Freud and Lacan suggest. Instead of a small, black hole, their 'woman' is cosmic; instead of 'object', she is limitless and boundless. However, 'she' is still being told who she is and how she desires. 'She' is still being understood and constructed through a discourse that bases itself on psychoanalytic structures. Irigaray argues in *This Sex Which is Not One* that "[Woman's] desire is often interpreted, and feared, as a sort of insatiable hunger, a voracity that will swallow you whole. Whereas it really involves a different economy more than anything else, one that upsets the linearity of a project, undermines the goal-object of a desire, diffuses the polarization toward a single pleasure, disconcerts fidelity to a single discourse" (29-30). Although many feminists may agree with Irigaray's interpretation, the implication in this statement is that there is an 'authentic' female desire that psychoanalysis has misunderstood.

The projects Cixous and Irigaray construct suggest the dominance psychoanalysis continues to have in the narrative understanding of desire. They rely on the structures Freud constructs and Lacan revises to build the foundations for their own interpretations of female desire. In doing so, their arguments are precariously balanced upon the very grounds they oppose. In many ways, they only strengthen what is there by giving credit to the dominance of its logic. Whether desire is constructed by Lacan as 'lack' or by Irigaray as 'two lips,' it is necessary to move

away from suggesting that desire needs to be conceived of as 'good' or 'bad.' This is a very complicated thing to do whilst trying to theorise desire; a word 'desire' that carries with it a response from the reader.

THE FEMINIST RESPONSE PART TWO

Irigaray and Cixous engage with the 'truths' of psychoanalysis as well as with a wider feminist project, one that suggests that another look at psychoanalysis can allow feminists to rethink and refigure the dynamics of female desire. However, as the last section examined, their strategy runs the risk of reinscribing itself into the very boundaries it attempts to expand. In the next section, I will consider the work of two feminists, Carolee Schneeman and Diane Elam, in order to explore ways in which a feminist engagement with psychoanalysis can move away from the circular debate on lack.

CAROLEE SCHNEEMAN

Carolee Schneeman is well known for her work in performance art as well as for her feminist insight. Her daring and often controversial work confronts ideas about the female body in performance as well as many other potent issues within feminism. As a graduate of the University of Illinois and a painter, Schneeman entered into the kinetic environment of the New York 'Happenings' in 1961. In *Against Interpretation*, Susan Sontag describes these 'Happenings' as "an art of radical juxtaposition."⁷⁵ 'Happenings' were a radical juxtaposition of sounds, smells, positions, words, and movements. They often took place in an artist's loft instead of

⁷⁵ Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 263. Her chapter is entitled: "Happenings: an art of radical juxtaposition."

a conventional stage. There was no plot or discourse to follow, everything happened in the present and through a series of actions and events. Drawing out of her experience both as a female performer in male dominated 'Happenings' and as an artist interested in "flesh as material,"⁷⁶ Schneeman's first installation piece, "Eye/Body," (1963) engages directly with feminist and sexual issues.

In her brilliant exploration of *The Explicit Body in Performance*, Rebecca Schneider introduces her readers to Carolee Schneeman's work as well as to her unique contribution to performance art and feminism. Schneider argues that out of the "impasse" created by the rift between poststructuralists and feminists who advocated a female essence, came a feminist "both/and" that allows for critical agency and mobility that Schneeman pursues in her work.⁷⁷ As she writes: "Like a Brechtian 'not, but' this feminist 'both/and' makes room for critical inquiry, political agency, and discursive mobility. This double agency was arguably present as 'messiness' in Schneeman's work even in the early 1960's [. . .] [Schneeman] wanted her body to remain erotic, sexual, both 'desired *and* desiring,' while underscoring it as clearly volitional as well: 'marked, written over in a text of stroke and gesture discovered by my creative female will.'"⁷⁸

The connection Schneider makes between Schneeman's work and a feminist "both/and" is a very important one to consider. Schneider draws attention to the way Schneeman's work engages with both positions in the movement of desire: the desirer and the desired. This "both/and" can be likened to Irigaray's "double gesture" in that each paradoxically take two sides with equal strength. Irigaray confronts

⁷⁶ Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 31.

⁷⁷ Schneider, *The Explicit Body*, p. 36.

⁷⁸ Schneider, *The Explicit Body*, pp. 36-37.

psychoanalysis on a local and global level and is both constructivist and essentialist at the same time. For Schneeman, this double movement relates to the way the body can be positioned as object and subject in desire. Her work suggests that there is value in allowing seemingly opposing sides to operate in conjunction with each other instead of insisting on one or the other.

Schneeman's work maintains a feminist "both/and" approach and yet extends this strategy to suggest other possible ways of approaching dominant discourses. In a departure from her performance work, Schneeman deals with the relationship between 'woman' and 'desire' in her piece entitled, "Vulva's Morphia"⁷⁹ (1981-1995) (see figure #1). The circular logic of desire, from Freud to French feminism, is visually represented beginning with biology and ending with Feminist Constructivist Semiotics. She takes her viewer through the progression of 'new' theories constructed on the subject of female desire. The progression follows a circular logic; ending in much the same place it began, thus explaining and parodying the repetitive and cyclical nature of theories on female desire. They circle back to the beginning, never escaping from the inscription of lack, void and always connected to the phallus/patriarchy. Desire, as detailed in Schneeman's work, is understood through the position it takes within phallic discourse. It is a circle that continues to spin as definitions of 'woman' and 'desire' are embroiled within phallogentric logic.

Schneeman plays with the dominant discourse of desire, attempting to explain "how the circle of confusion is caused." The first two, of the six, descriptives supported by pictorial representations of vaginas and women read: "Vulva reads biology and understands she is an amalgam of proteins and oxytoxin hormones

⁷⁹ Carolee Schneeman, "Vulva's Morphia, 1981-1995," in *Féminin masculin: Le Sexe de l'art* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 1995), p. 111.

VULVA'S SCHOOL

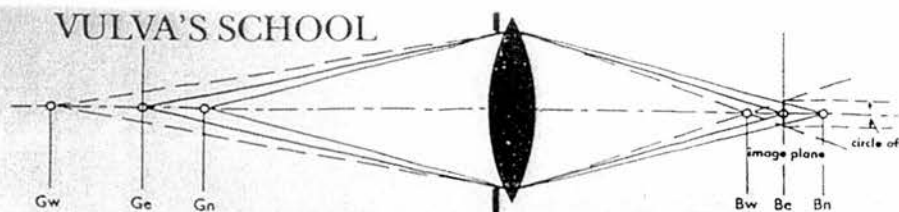
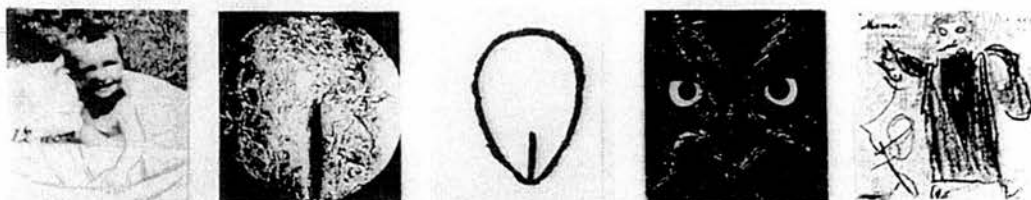


Fig. 1 HOW THE CIRCLE OF CONFUSION IS CAUSED



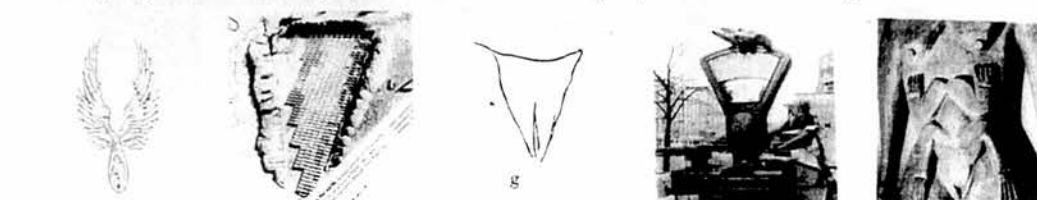
Vulva reads biology and understands she is an amalgam of proteins and oxytocin hormones which govern all her desires...



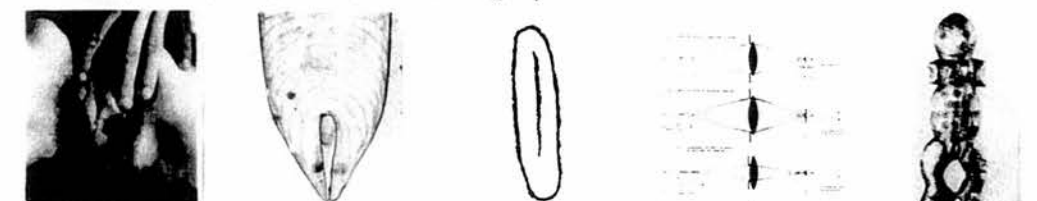
Vulva deciphers Lacan and Baudrillard and discovers she is only a sign, a signification of the void, of absence, of what is not male... (she is given a pen for taking notes...)



Vulva reads Masters and Johnson and understands her vaginal orgasms have not been measured by any instrumentality and that she should only experience clitoral orgasms...



Vulva recognizes her symbols and names on graffiti under the railroad trestle: slit, snatch, enchilada, beaver, muff, coozie, fish and finger pie...



Vulva strips naked, fills her mouth and cunt with paint brushes, and runs into the Cedar Bar at midnight to frighten the ghosts of de Kooning, Pollock, Kline...



Vulva decodes Feminist Constructivist Semiotics and realizes she has no authentic feelings at all; even her erotic sensations are constructed by patriarchal projections, impositions, and conditioning...

which govern all her desires” and “Vulva deciphers Lacan and Baudrillard and discovers she is only a sign, a signification of the void, of absence, of what is not male. . . (she is given a pen for taking notes . . .).” Schneeman’s work presents a visual ‘history’ of female desire over the last decade (or one narrative). She parodies the way biologists, theorists, painters and even feminists have used vulva as their own muse. Her character, “Vulva,” reads, deciphers, recognises, and decodes the ways in which she is meant to symbolise, signify, and frighten. She is instructed by others on who she is, how she must feel, and what she must do; hence Schneeman’s title: “Vulva’s School.” The piece rather obviously suggests the ways women are told about their desires: through theories on sexuality, through mass media, through culture, and even through feminist politics. It also serves as an interesting counterpoint to the strength and dominance of the phallus who deciphers Lacan and learns that he is the signifying force in the logic of desire and language.

The pictorial images that accompany Schneeman’s ‘history’ construct their own history, a history of the vulva in art. From basic drawings, like those that run down the centre column, to those that depict the vagina in abstract form, to ‘real’ pictures such as of a 12 month old girl and a woman masturbating, each depict both the subject and the differing representations of female sexuality. The images are primitive, abstract, figurative, demonstrative, and realistic. They represent the variety of thoughts on the vagina from the medical, to the abstract, to the intimate. Combining both a visual and textual ‘history’ of the vulva, Schneeman reminds us of the interrelationship between art and theories of women’s desire.

Beginning each line with “Vulva,” Schneeman gives female desire an agency within the influential external forces she cites. “Vulva strips naked, fills her mouth

and cunt with paint brushes, and runs into the Cedar Bar at midnight to frighten the ghosts of de Kooning, Pollock, Kline. . .” Here, and in other lines, Schneeman awards vulva agency – she is sticking the paintbrushes in and frightening the painters that depict her. Schneeman may also be making allusions here to her own performative work in which she covers her naked body with paint, grease and chalk as if to declare, as Schneider puts it: “If I am a token, then I’ll be a token to reckon with.”⁸⁰

Schneeman’s learning vulva is running naked at midnight, as opposed to being chased. She is the subject of their paintings, a receptacle for their own art; however, in Schneeman’s version, vulva becomes a curious and precocious subject trying out something new. She is always on to the next idea, even if with reservations.

However, ‘vulva’ is also pictured with a gaping hole. The pictorial images are necessary both in reference to this chapter and in Schneeman’s argument because it is important to remember that visually the vagina resembles a hole, a gap, a lack, which is where the psychoanalytic theory originates. It is important not to locate the physical solely in theory or language because it misses the obvious connection between the hole in the woman’s vulva and the presumption that it needs to be filled with a man’s penis. It sounds very crass put in these terms, which perhaps is why terms like ‘lack’ and ‘gap’ are used in psychoanalysis.

Each line of “Vulva’s Morphia” ends in ellipses, suggesting to the viewer that once vulva has read, deciphered, decoded or recognised the theory presented to her, she is off and running to another one. The ellipses also gesture towards the temporary

⁸⁰ Schneider, *The Explicit Body*, p. 35.

and fleeting nature of each theory. They displace a sovereignty of any one meaning, definition, or theory on female desire by suggesting that there is always another around the corner, and always one that will be read, deciphered, and then ultimately rejected by the learning vulva.

Through this piece, Schneeman offers her viewers an education in the theorisation of desire. Her learning and uneven tempered vulva suggests that we, as theorists, artists, and as women, must not subscribe whole heartedly to any one discourse or field of thought on woman's desire, not even those offered by women. On the one hand, the sentences which lay out each field of thought are organised to suggest a linear 'history,' a path that each learning vulva takes in order to 'arrive' at what appears to be an infinite end in that it is characterised by an ellipses. Schneeman's work demonstrates the way the debate over 'lack,' with Freud and Lacan on the one side and Irigaray and Cixous on the other, is 'past down' and carried on through the work of feminist artists and theorists. Her piece also suggests that the only way forward or even sideways, is to keep moving and to keep learning new ways in which to approach the subject of female desire.

DIANE ELAM

In order to pursue this 'sideways' style of learning, I turn to feminist theorist, Diane Elam, whose work on the question of woman as well as on feminist politics offers another approach to the problems inherent in a theorisation of desire. Elam's work raises central issues and problems in theorising feminism as well as deconstruction, postmodernism and romanticism.⁸¹ In *Feminism and Deconstruction*:

⁸¹ See also, Diane Elam, *Romancing the Postmodern; Feminism Beside Itself*, ed. by Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman.

Ms. en Abyrne, Diane Elam sets up a “disruptive linkage”⁸² between feminism and deconstruction. Instead of curing one with the other, or teaching one to the other, she places them side by side to learn from their points of intersection. Her “disruptive linkage” provides a structure that can be extended to think ‘in between’ the complex theories of psychoanalysis and those argued by feminists. It also allows for alternative interpretations to enter, as no one discourse is privileged.

Elam argues that any attempt to define ‘woman’ completely only succeeds in demonstrating the infinite possibilities of the category itself. She argues that, “women both are determined and are yet to be determined”⁸³ and explains this contingency by recasting the term ‘mise en abyme,’ a form of endless deferral, to include a feminist understanding, which she terms the “ms. en abyme.” Elam uses the term “ms. en abyme” to suggest that attempts at determining or categorising women through representation do not end in an arrival of a distinct ‘woman.’ Instead, these attempts suggest both the infinite possibilities of women and the failure of such attempts at a final meaning of woman.

Elam's work offers feminists an alternative perspective on the debates raised by theorists such as Irigaray and Cixous. As discussed earlier, Irigaray and Cixous each rely on a static image of female subjectivity that inhibits other possibilities from arising. Although the ‘woman’ they envision is in line with feminist ideology, their arguments suggest that there is a ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ representation of woman instead of problematising the category of woman altogether.

Elam's critique of the question of ‘woman’ is very useful in terms of theorising desire. Her work moves beyond ‘identity politics’ and raises issues and problems in

⁸² Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction*, p. 13.

⁸³ Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction*, p. 27.

using a singular representation to construct a political movement. Although her argument centres on the relationship between feminism and deconstruction, her ideas can also help us rethink desire. The “ms. en abyme” problematises the relationship between subject and object in representation. In the “ms. en abyme,” the movement between subject and object is fluid and unstable. The object’s endless regression into itself escapes the subject’s hold which leads to a destabilisation of the subject itself. Following out of this logic, woman can be neither subject nor object: an important (de)construction of the discursive structures of desire and politics.

In Elam’s refiguring, woman as a category does not have to fit within the role of subject or object. This interchangeability is similar to the “and/but” Schneider refers to and yet it is different in the way it is put in motion: subject and object infinitely change place in the structure of the “ms. en abyme.”⁸⁴ Using the framework of the “ms. en abyme,” desirer and desired can be figured as always in motion, as endlessly changing roles with each other instead of as fulfilling particular roles set out for them in a static and fixed logic. The fluidity of these roles is particularly important to a feminist rethinking of desire. Instead of trying to refigure woman as subject, as opposed to object or “receptacle” to man’s desire, as Grosz suggests, it is possible to reconsider the role of desirer and desired as infinitely changing positions in the economy of desire. That is, neither man nor woman determines or is determined by a position in desire. Placing the dynamics of desire into abyme allows us, as theorists, to look at the problem of desire from a different angle. Instead of trying to elevate woman to a position equal to man or even higher, or to cure the lack she is given by psychoanalysis, it is possible to focus on how each position in desire

⁸⁴ Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction*, p. 28

functions as well as how desire creates connections and builds foundations. In other words, we can think about the productive possibilities in the movement of desire instead of limiting ourselves to the worn-out debates on whether or not woman is lack or limitless.

Elam alludes to these possibilities in her conclusion to *Feminism and Deconstruction* when she writes:

To put this another way, we don't need more lessons in how to be a woman; feminism is no longer only the search for an authoritative, subjective, speaking position. In a sense, then, we have to learn to negotiate outside the horizon of authority. No more authoritative deconstructions of literary texts, no more authoritative statements on the essence of woman. To speak without recourse to the meta-language of authority is to speak as singularities, to attempt to do justice in singular cases, rather than to be just once and for all. It is this dispersal of the modernist horizon of social justice that feminism and deconstruction work for. That work is not without its moments of achievement, but it is an endless work, an abyssal politics. . .⁸⁵

I have quoted this final passage at length for several important reasons: the first is to respond to Elam's call to move beyond authoritative horizons. The question of authority and the need to abandon its imposing horizon is an important and relevant one for feminist politics. Because feminism has often relied on friction from a dominant and authoritative other to structure its politics, it has been placed in the position of repeating and reinscribing itself within the very logic it seeks to revise, as

⁸⁵ Elam. *Feminism and Deconstruction*, p. 120.

demonstrated in Irigaray's and Cixous's work. The circular logic that develops from this oppositional strategy does not liberate desire, rather it enforces new limits and definitions onto its readers.

Another important issue that Elam raises is that of social justice. Although not directly related to this project on desire, her call to approach justice in singular cases instead of as "once and for all" can be linked to the universal models that psychoanalysis insists upon in its theorisation of sexuality. Instead of following Freud's grand narrative of Oedipus or Lacan's refiguring of the castration complex, it is necessary to move away from grand and totalising remedies to human sexuality. Moving away from the desire to answer conclusively and definitively for all, allows the dynamics of an argument to enter as well as alternative possibilities to arise.

Finally, I would like to draw a comparison between the ellipses that come at the end of each statement in Schneeman's piece and the ellipsis that brings a open closure to each chapter in Elam's text. In both cases, the ellipses can be read as a gesture towards the multiple possibilities that are available to theorists if they abandon the need for conclusive endings and continue to negotiate words such as 'desire' and 'woman.' In Schneeman's piece, these ellipses stand in for the vast amount of work that has been done on each statement; in Elam's work, the ellipsis can be interpreted as giving space to the "endless work" that still needs to be done.

It will not help feminists to continue to debate over whether or not Freud and Lacan are 'right.' To negotiate the term "lack" always means an engagement both with lack and with the history it carries with it, a long and complicated history. It is important for feminists to abandon projects that aim to fill or 'cure' the "lack"

psychoanalysis assigns to 'woman.' It is also necessary to move beyond a feminist politics that uses woman as a static image to stabilise its foundations.

2. H.D. AND FREUD

Psychoanalysis derives its understanding of desire from the interaction between analyst and analysand. For this reason, as well as others, it is important to be aware of the processes and dynamics in the analytic scene. A written account of the analytic sessions between the founding 'father' of psychoanalysis and a woman imagist poet promises a unique perspective both on the scene of analysis and on the problematic relationship between Freud and his theories on women. Although H.D.'s *Tribute to Freud* may not deliver an answer to Freud's interpretations of 'woman,' her *Tribute* does demonstrate the role desire plays in the correspondence between analyst and analysand. Because she is a woman writing about her experiences with Freud, her *Tribute* has been taken up by feminist critics as both an example of wider claims about women's writing and as a way of talking about psychoanalysis and feminism. I argue that H.D.'s *Tribute* not only illustrates her vision of a recognition between the sexes but also reminds her readers of the limitations in any *one* reading of desire.

This chapter is divided into two sections: the first part focuses on the relationship between H.D. and Freud in her *Tribute to Freud* and the second part focuses on H.D.'s feminist critics. H.D.'s narrative assumes a dual position of analysand and analyst in which H.D. re-reads and re-understands herself, Freud and the relationship between them. In doing so, her work illustrates the dynamics of the analytic scene and the way desire is formulated in analysis. The second part examines feminist criticism of H.D.'s text, particularly from Susan Stanford Friedman, and more recent criticism from Dianne Chisholm and Claire Buck. I will

argue that their attempts to establish subjectivity in H.D.'s *Tribute* or to level the terrain between H.D. and Freud in order to make wider claims for feminism overlook the possibilities in the recognition between 'man' and 'woman' that H.D. envisions.

READING PSYCHOANALYSIS AND LITERATURE

In his essay entitled "The Analytic Experience: Means, Ends, and Results," Jacques-Alain Miller critiques the academic usage of psychoanalytic terms and analytical writing in the interpretation of literary texts. He returns again and again to the phrase "I use Lacan"⁸⁶ to draw attention to the problematic position literary critics take in their readings of literature and psychoanalysis. To him, the phrase "I use Lacan to read X" is synonymous with "I am the analyst of a dead analysand," or "I am the analysand of a dead analyst."⁸⁷ To a certain extent, Miller's claim makes sense. In a way, critics do become analysts to a dead analysand when they engage in a reading of Freud's or Lacan's work and, at the same time, when critics *use* Lacan, or Freud, they also become analysands to a dead analyst. However, the extent to which Miller's claims make sense is in relation to how he frames his understanding of literary criticism within the structure of the analytic experience. That is, Miller understands the dynamics of literary criticism insofar as they operate within a psychoanalytic structure. In doing so, he misses the alternative possibilities that literary criticism and psychoanalysis have to offer each other.

Miller's critique of the academic use of psychoanalysis stems from the distinction he draws between the analytic experience and the act of interpretation by a literary critic. For Miller, the literary critic is working with dead objects that will

⁸⁶ Jacques-Alain Miller, "The Analytic Experience: Means, Ends, and Results," (pp. 85, 86, 88).

⁸⁷ Miller, "The Analytic Experience," p. 88.

never be able to talk back if questioned or answered. In contrast to the literary critic, Miller argues that the discourse between analyst and analysand is performative and works toward a cure. As he discusses: “[The literary critic’s] work takes place in the space, in the distance, in the cleavage, in the splitting between what an author wrote and what we know of what he meant. And that is enough to justify the use of the word *interpretation*.”⁸⁸ Here Miller demonstrates that his understanding of literary theory is in relation to its failure to talk back or ‘cure’ the text of its symptoms. In locating the critic’s medium as the “splitting” between the language of the text and the author’s intention, Miller tries to draw a parallel between this “splitting” and the splitting between what an analysand says and what s/he means in analysis. As analyst, Miller argues that he can read and interpret his patient’s speech in order to make meaning, whereas he finds the literary critic’s task impossible because s/he does not have the advantage of being able to interpret the performative aspect of the text. Judith Butler’s explanation of performative speech in *Excitable Speech: a Politics of the Performative*⁸⁹ may be a useful way to counter Miller’s claims. However, what is important here is both how Miller reads literary criticism’s failures through a psychoanalytic framework, and how doing so prevents him from appreciating the possibilities that arise when the two are read together.

Instead of “using Lacan to read X,” or instead of applying psychoanalytic models to the narrative structure of the text, which only succeed in producing a ‘Lacanian’ or ‘Freudian’ reading, critics can read for what one critic calls the “interimplications.”⁹⁰ Text and theory can be read together instead of one on top of

⁸⁸ Miller, “The Analytic Experience,” p. 87.

⁸⁹ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: a Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

⁹⁰ Dianne Chisholm, *H.D.’s Freudian Poetics*, p. 2. Chisholm’s work will be discussed further at the end of this chapter.

the other. A 'hierarchical model' of theory, one that organises itself around a master or dominant discourse, is not inverted; rather it is levelled so that the two can be in discourse. Theory is not used to elicit meaning from the text, rather to be in dialogue with it. And yet, this dialogue between critic and text is not meant to function in an analytic way, that is, in a way that seeks to 'cure' or solve the text; rather this dialogue encourages connections to be made and multiple ideas to emerge.

This multivalent approach to reading is not confined to the critical study of psychoanalysis and literature. As discussed in the last chapter, Diane Elam's work brings seemingly opposing movements together in order to read them side by side.⁹¹ Instead of reading one field as a master discourse to another, it is possible to consider the arguments in each at the same time, without privileging one over the other. This 'sideways' look at theoretical fields allows a critic to move beyond some of the underlying implications of readings that do "use" Lacan or of those that use feminist theory to "cure" psychoanalysis. As discussed in the first chapter, projects such as Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* suggest that psychoanalysis can be 'fixed' in order to better understand female sexuality.

As discussed briefly in the last chapter, Elam's "ms. en abyme" stems from her rethinking of feminism and deconstruction. The "ms. en abyme" problematises the relationship between subject and object and in so doing, provides theorists with a model to rethink subject and object roles; as Elam outlines the "ms. en abyme:"

The infinitely receding object in the *mise en abyme* closes down the possibility of a stable subject/object relation. On the one hand, the object cannot be grasped by the subject; it slips away into infinity. On the other

⁹¹ Elam follows this approach in *Feminism Beside Itself, Romancing the Postmodern*, and in *Feminism and Deconstruction: Ms. en Abyme*.

hand, this produces a parallel regression in the subject or viewer of the *mise en abyme*. As the object recedes into itself, the subject is destabilised; it loses not merely its capacity to grasp the object but also its grasp on itself. The subject thus is faced with its inability to know what it knows, to see what it sees. In this sense, the subject becomes the subject of a representation that exceeds it. Seeing that they have been fooled, viewing subjects see themselves as fools, *objects* of a visual joke.⁹²

In Elam's rendering of the 'mise en abyme,' neither object nor subject has the upper hand in the pursuit of knowledge. This interchange is particularly important in light of feminist politics, as Elam argues, as it disrupts the authority in both positions and keeps the question of woman both determined and yet to be determined.⁹³ Feminist projects that seek to establish subjectivity in their analyses, often overlook the limitations and problems that arise within the subject position. As Elam humorously explains: "Debbie may not be doing Dallas or the dishes this time, but when Debbie does driving she is still conforming to pre-existing, restrictive criteria in order to take up the subject position 'woman.' Moving from the back seat to the front is not the same thing as getting out of the car."⁹⁴ Instead of trying to read 'woman' as subject instead of object, to move her from the "back seat to the front," it is important, as Elam points out, to get out of the car altogether.

Getting "out of the car" necessitates a critical evaluation of the frameworks and structures that contain subject and object positions. Two such frameworks are feminism and psychoanalysis. Elam's model of the "ms. en abyme" can be extended

⁹² Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction*, p. 28.

⁹³ Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction*, p. 27.

⁹⁴ Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction*, p. 29.

to help us, as theorists, to understand the problems that arise in the meeting place between literary criticism, feminism and psychoanalysis. The “ms. en abyme” reminds us to be wary of projects which attempt to close down or define the question of woman, or, to build upon Elam’s examination, of desire. Instead of reading for subjectivity, as many earlier feminist criticisms do, it is possible to examine how a narrator such as H.D. in her *Tribute to Freud*, takes on the role of object and subject, desirer and desired and most important to her relationship with Freud, as analysand and analyst. Understanding the fluidity and interchangeability between these opposing roles allows us to approach a text such as H.D.’s in order to see what it creates and how it functions, instead of trying to assert what it means or represents.

H.D., a “writing signet or sign manual”⁹⁵ for Hilda Doolittle (1886-1961) is not as well known or read as her modernist counterpoints such as Ezra Pound, D. H. Lawrence and Gertrude Stein. For this reason, it is necessary to briefly introduce her writing which includes poetry, memoirs, essays, novels, translations, and, important to this chapter, a tribute. H.D.’s writing often draws on her own personal experiences, such as in *Palimpsest* (1926) and *Nights* (1935) as well as references from Greek mythology such as in *Helen in Egypt* (1961) and in her poetry. Her writing also demonstrates a strong interest and understanding of the psyche. For example, in *Notes on Thoughts and Vision and the Wise Sappho* (1919), H.D. elaborates on what she calls the “over-mind” and ‘jelly-fish consciousness’ in order to pursue her own ideas on mind-body dualism and its affects on the creative

⁹⁵ H.D., *Tribute to Freud* (London: Carcanet Press, 1985), p. 66. Subsequent references will appear in the text.

process.⁹⁶ Her interest in psychoanalysis may have began as early as 1910⁹⁷ and led her to analytic sessions with Havelock Ellis, Mary Chadwick, Hanns Sachs, and Sigmund Freud.

H.D.'s wrote about her sessions with Freud in "Writing on the Wall," later published as *Tribute to Freud* in 1956. More recent publications also include a more autobiographical account of H.D.'s session entitled "Advent." In order to avoid confusion, when referring to *Tribute* I am referring to "Writing on the Wall" unless otherwise stated. *Tribute to Freud* weaves stories from H.D.'s analytic sessions with Freud, with memories from her travels in Greece, and recollections of her family. She explains her style as follows: "I do not want to become involved in the strictly historical sequence. I wish to recall the impressions, or rather I wish the impressions to recall me. Let the impressions come in their own way, make their own sequence" (14).⁹⁸ The way in which she allows impressions to narrate her *Tribute* reflect the influence the structure of the psychoanalytic session has on her writing. As different images are described, they are framed within a greater context, given significance and linked to other events that have come before or will come later. Situating her recollections within a greater structural meaning is reflective of the analyst's role, who takes his patient's recollections and 'makes sense' of them within a wider

⁹⁶ H.D., *Notes on Thoughts and Vision and the Wise Sappho* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1982), p. 19. In the "Introduction," Albert Gelpi notes that *Notes on Thoughts* was originally written in 1919 in notebook form with the inscription "July, Scilly Islands," p. 7. Subsequent references will appear in the text.

⁹⁷ Susan Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 17. Friedman also notes that H.D.'s relationship with Frances Bryher, who at one time thought of becoming an analyst, was particularly influential in H.D.'s decision to seek analysis with Freud, pp. 17-20.

⁹⁸ As part of a 'cure' to H.D.'s writing block, Freud suggest that she write a history of her life without "embellishment or distancing masks." In her letters to Bryher, H.D. refers to this 'cure' as the "damn vol." and expresses great frustration over having to write a "straight narrative," *Psyche Reborn*, p. 30. Perhaps the style H.D. adopts in *Tribute* is partly a resistance to write another "straight narrative," a desire to let the events come as they do in her mind.

framework.

The narrative structure of H.D.'s *Tribute* also suggests a movement between the person she was in her analytic sessions with Freud during 1933 to 1934 and the person she is when she writes *Tribute to Freud*. In her *Tribute*, H.D. is returning to the scene of analysis with Freud which initiates a revision of the analysis, or solution that is initially proposed in the primary scene. Here I am referring to the 'primary scene' as the analytic sessions H.D. has with Freud that she describes through her impressions. She uses these impressions to construct what I am calling a 'secondary scene' of analysis in which she reframes the primary scene in order to analyse both herself and Freud. In her discursive return to the primary scene of analysis, H.D. revises her position as analysand or student and asserts (inserts) herself as analyst. The narrative glance is focused on the analyst in the primary scene, Freud, and on herself as analysand. She looks at Freud looking on her 'former' self. The construction of a secondary scene of analysis places the primary scene in a field of representation. The narrative constructs a representation of the past and commands it to perform again, this time under her direction. However, as Miller argues, this approach places H.D. in a position of being an analyst to a dead analysand.

In her influential work on H.D. in *Penelope's Web: Gender, Modernity, H.D.'s Fiction*, Susan Stanford Friedman explains the dynamics of H.D.'s text in a similar way, taking note of the way H.D.'s narrative constructs two separate 'I's': "H.D.'s texts about her analysis with Freud split the autobiographical subject, to construct an 'I then' who was engaged in the talking cure with Freud and an 'I now' who repeats that initial experience as a writing cure. Each text doubles the analysis by recreating the primary scene of analysis in the past and then establishing a

secondary scene of analysis constituted in and through the act of writing.”⁹⁹ As Friedman suggests, H.D.’s subjectivity is split between the ‘cured’ narrator who has already finished her analysis with Freud and the student who is still undergoing analysis in the narrative. Doubling back on herself, H.D. creates a rupture in the constitution of her identity. She is both the woman she is now and the woman she was then.

For example, within H.D.’s analysis of herself, she writes “I *owned* myself” and then right after contradicts this statement by adding: “I did not really, of course [. . .] But I *had* something” as if to demonstrate how the “I now” can look back on the “I then” with a greater understanding of herself and of her relation to Freud (13). H.D. is not only establishing herself as a woman writer, but she is rewriting the way in which she knows herself in relation to Freud. She can re-enter the analytic scene of the past and construct for herself what she wants it to be; a dialogue between Freud and H.D.; a passage into knowing herself and her place within psychoanalysis. As she writes: “[Freud and I] had come together in order to substantiate something” (13).

The autobiographical style of H.D.’s *Tribute to Freud* may seduce a literary critic into playing the role of analyst. As a critic, I look upon H.D. looking upon herself and her analyst, Freud. According to Miller’s argument, I, as literary critic, become analyst to my ‘dead’ analysands, H.D. and Freud, or I become an analysand to my dead analysts, H.D. and Freud. However, by casting my reading into the “ms. en abyme” I will draw out the precarious and unstable nature of analysing H.D.’s analysis of her analytic experience. Instead of arguing towards a definitive

⁹⁹ Friedman, *Penelope’s Web: Gender, Modernity, H.D.’s Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 293.

subjectivity for H.D. in order to gain feminist ground, I will examine the recognition H.D. proposes between her poetic vision and Freud's psychoanalysis.

PART ONE: READING H.D. AND FREUD

ANALYST AND ANALYSAND

H.D. saw Freud on two separate occasions in Vienna between 1933 and 1934. The first session took place from March 1st through June 12th in 1933, and the second from October 31st to December 2nd, 1934.¹⁰⁰ H.D. begins her *Tribute to Freud* by explaining that her return is marked by J.J. van der Leeuw's death, the man whose analytic session with Freud came before her own. Upon hearing about van der Leeuw's death in a plane crash, H.D. returns to see Freud in order to express her sorrow, to which he replies: "You have come to take his place" (6). It is left unclear whether "his place" refers to van der Leeuw's analytic session, for H.D. and van der Leeuw have "exchanged 'hours'" (8) before, or whether H.D. imagines she will take van der Leeuw's place as the heir to psychoanalysis, a role she always expected van der Leeuw would fulfil: "I felt all the time that he was the person who would apply, carry on the torch – carry on [Freud's] ideas, but not in a stereotyped way" (6).

Although H.D. cites her reason for returning to Freud as a way of telling him that she is sorry for van der Leeuw's death, her inclusion of Freud's response that "she wants to take his place" suggests somewhat implicitly that his analysis of her return is a more accurate reading. H.D.'s fond recollections of van der Leeuw have less to do with the intimacy of their friendship – for as she admits they were

¹⁰⁰ Louis H. Silverstein, "Herself Delineated: Chronological Highlights of H.D.," in *Signets: Reading H.D.*, ed. by Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), pp. 32-45, (pp. 40-44).

strangers (8) – than as a means of establishing herself as Freud's heir. Comparing van der Leeuw to the winged messenger Mercury (7), H.D. suggests that his death gives her a reason to return to the work she began with Freud in 1933 and yet not as a patient, but as a student. The way in which H.D. frames her return to Freud as both an apology and as an acceptance of van der Leeuw's place suggests that she desires to begin a 'new' relationship with Freud as his heir to psychoanalysis.

H.D. makes it clear that she and van der Leeuw were not in analysis as analysands, but as Freud's students, hence her belief that she or van der Leeuw was in line to be Freud's 'heir.' Friedman makes an allusion to H.D.'s position as Freud's student as opposed to his patient in *Penelope's Web*: "During the 1930's, Freud took only analysands whom he considered 'students' of one kind or another. Most likely, he assessed the potential of an analysand not only in terms of personal neurosis, but also in connection with what he or she might contribute to the future of psychoanalysis."¹⁰¹ The position that H.D. assumes in her narration as student, not patient, not only changes the dynamics of her analytic sessions with Freud, but affects the way she reframes and rewrites these experiences in *Tribute to Freud*. If she was Freud's 'student' at the time of her analysis, then her return to the scene through writing signals the "I now" as someone who has not only learned from Freud, but someone who now has the ability to analyse the situation in a manner that Freud would approve of, or would even be impressed with.

H.D. leaves a trace in her rewriting of a desire to establish herself as 'different' from other patients that have undergone analysis with Freud, as well as to

¹⁰¹ Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, p. 291; Friedman includes a reference to Smiley Blanton's *Diary of My Analysis with Sigmund Freud*, ed. M.G. Blanton (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1971), pp.5, 35 in the text.

suggest that her relationship with Freud was different than that of purely analyst/analysand. H.D. insists on her uniqueness amongst the people that are protecting Freud, such as Princess George of Greece and those that attempt to chronicle the events of his life, like Hann Sachs and Walter Schmideberg (14-15). She appears particularly jealous of the role Princess George plays in Freud's life, telling her readers that "I cannot compete with her. Consciously, I do not feel any desire to do so. But unconsciously, I probably wish to be another equal factor or have equal power of benefiting and protecting the Professor" (43). H.D.'s confidence in using psychoanalytic terminology is evident in this example. She recalls her impressions in order to analyse both her conscious and unconscious desires. However, in this example, as in the one concerning J.J. van der Leeuw's death, her desire to be close to Freud or to assume a position that is separate from other people in his life, is relegated to unconscious motives. In both examples, she states a desire to assume a role in relation to Freud that is both unique and privileged (his heir), and yet she is careful to put these desires either in the context of Freud's analysis of her or in the realm of the unconscious. In doing so, she creates a distance between her desires and her responsibility for them. If her desires are unconscious or if they are part of Freud's analysis, not her own, then she cannot be held accountable or judged unfairly for secretly desiring a unique position in Freud's life.

The narrative movement between Freud's analysis of H.D. and H.D.'s analysis of herself displaces any real 'authority' or any 'one' way of analysing H.D.'s desires. This movement between analyses also problematises the transference between Freud and H.D. Although, the word transference does not appear in

Tribute,¹⁰² it is a fundamental part of the analytic experience and one that has been at the centre of psychoanalytic debates since its conception.¹⁰³ In terms of the analytic scene, the underlying link in transference is between the analyst's desire and the patient's desire. Transference occurs when the patient transfers his/her affections to the analyst. In other words, the patient learns to love by loving the analyst first and by seeing the analyst as the "subject who is supposed to know."¹⁰⁴ The analysand must accept the analyst as the "subject who is supposed to know" in order for her/him to transfer his/her desires. S/he must imagine that the analyst is the guardian of the truth that s/he desires to discover. Although H.D. refers to Freud as a "guardian" (103, 111) or "Door-Keeper" (98), the implicit suggestion is that he is a reference point for her ideas, not a locus point for all truth and knowledge.

In one of their initial meetings, Freud tells H.D.: "The trouble is – I am an old man – *you do not think it worth your while to love me*" (16). As if to say, *I am an old man, how will you be able to transfer your affections to an old man like me?* H.D. explains her first reaction as follows: "The impact of his words was too dreadful – I simply felt nothing at all. I said nothing. What did he expect me to say? Exactly it was as if the Supreme being had hammered with his fist on the back of the couch where I had been lying. Why, anyway, did he do that? He must know everything or he didn't know anything" (16). Her references to the "Supreme being" and to the fact that Freud must know everything or nothing at all, recall the position

¹⁰² Friedman notes that the word 'transference' does not appear in *Tribute*, although she argues that H.D. alludes to a maternal transference, which will be discussed later in this chapter, *Penelope's Web*, p. 315.

¹⁰³ See also, Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 157-9; Sigmund Freud, *The Freud Reader* ed. Peter Gay, "Anna O," 60-78; "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria ("Dora"), pp. 234-239.

¹⁰⁴ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 230-243.

of the analyst in transference.

H.D.'s description of her reaction to Freud's demand for love carries with it the trace of the rewriting she is performing. She remembers her reaction: "I said nothing," and includes an analysis of her feelings which reveal the knowledge gained from doubling back. In her return to the primary scene, she is implying that Freud did not perform the role he was supposed to as analyst. She later explains this 'confusion' of roles as a result of the impending war. Arriving at her appointed time despite the Nazi occupation of Vienna, Freud is very surprised to see H.D. and asks her why she has come. She replies: "What did he expect me to say? [. . .] My being there surely expressed it? *I am here because no one else has come.* As if again, symbolically, I must be different [. . .] I did not know what the Professor was thinking. He could not be thinking, 'I am an old man – *you do not think it worth your while to love me.*' Or if he remembered having said that, this surely was the answer to it" (61-62). Her gesture is at once directed towards Freud and, at another, outside the experience of analysis. Perhaps she expects Freud to step out of his role as analyst and become patient to her listening and loving ears. The scene of analysis, particularly between a man (analyst) and woman (patient) sets up desire in the transference that is always negotiated and mediated by the analyst. In order for H.D. to 'see' herself as an equal to Freud surely the roles would have to, at least once, be reversed. Although the moment is not described or realised, the act of going back to analyse Freud through her writing imposes a scene of analysis, although as Miller suggests, she can only be the analyst to a "dead analysand."

H.D. suggests that what she is doing in her *Tribute* is different and in some respects, more important and more in tune with what the Professor would want. She

writes: "I did not want to murmur conventional words; plenty of people had done that. If I could not say exactly what I wanted to say, I would not say anything [. . .] The flowers and the words bear that in common, they are what I want, what I waited to find for the Professor"(63). She draws attention to the flowers that she waits to find for Freud knowing that gardenias are his favourite and that unlike other friends, she will not send anything in substitution for what she knows he desires most. Her attention to detail seems, at least in part, a need to be more than just a student or patient of Freud's. She tries to carve out a unique role for herself, there are protectors, biographers, friends, family, but she wants to be something different altogether. The prevalence of the 'I' in her explanation draws attention to her desire to be unique to Freud's life. The 'I' also draws attention to the fact that this tribute is more for H.D.'s benefit than for its benefactor: this is her project, her way of addressing Freud. She waits to find the words that will capture the knowledge she has gained of herself, and perhaps more importantly in this instance, of Freud's desires.

H.D.'s return to the scene of analysis can be read as a lover's return to familiar places and ideas shared. It is hard not to read H.D.'s descriptions of Freud as a sign of her love for him: "Maybe he laughed at the jokes, I don't know. His beautiful mouth seemed always slightly smiling, though his eyes, set deep and slightly asymmetrical under the domed forehead (with those furrows cut by a master chisel), were unrevealing. His eyes did not speak to me" (73). There are several ways of interpreting H.D.'s admission that Freud's eyes did not "speak" to her. She could be indicating that Freud did not return her gaze. Lying on a couch with Freud at his desk it would be hard to see into his eyes. In their article titled "Bergasse 19: Freud's

office,” Diana Fuss and Joel Sanders draw attention to the physical layout of the analyst’s office in order to explain the connection between the architecture of Freud’s room and the workings of the analytic *mise en scène*. As Fuss and Sanders explain: “The consulting room chair stands as a fundamentally uninhabitable space, a tribute to the imposing figure of the analyst who remains, even to the searching eye of the camera, totally and enigmatically other.”¹⁰⁵ Perhaps Freud’s eyes do not “speak” to H.D. because she cannot see them from her perspective.

H.D.’s impression can also be read as a sense of frustration that she cannot be an analyst to Freud. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Jacques Lacan writes in reference to the gaze that: “From the outset, we see, in the dialectic of the eye and the gaze, that there is no coincidence, but, on the contrary, a lure. When, in love, I solicit a look, what is profoundly unsatisfying and always missing is that – *You never look at me from the place from which I see you.*”¹⁰⁶ H.D.’s awareness that Freud’s eyes did not “speak” to her could suggest that he does not put himself in H.D.’s position, from the ‘place from which she sees him.’ As long as this is true, then they are just analyst and analysand. I am suggesting that she both desires to be recognised by Freud and yet can only achieve this recognition through rewriting the events between them in analysis. In her return to the primary scene of analysis she can enact the love, the reciprocity, and the recognition that she originally desires and that she imagines is there from the beginning.

¹⁰⁵ Diana Fuss and Joel Sanders, “Bergasse 19: Freud’s Office,” in *Stud: Architectures of Masculinity* ed. by Joel Sanders (New York : Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 112-137, (p. 134).

¹⁰⁶ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 102-3.

SYMPTOM AND INSPIRATION

Within her re-writing and remembering of her analysis with Freud, H.D. draws a distinction between her 'methodology' and Freud's, suggesting their mutual ability to heal and cure, however different their strategies may be: "So again I can say the Professor was not always right. That is, yes, he was always right in his judgements, but my form of rightness, my intuition, sometimes functioned by the split-second (that makes all the difference in spiritual time-computations) the quicker" (98). The 'I' here is the "I now" that looks back at herself, and in this case, at Freud. In her return to the scene through writing she can identify that he was not always right and yet she does so in order to suggest that her own form of analysis functions at a level different from his own, and yet with similar powers to cure.

In *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.*, Susan Stanford Friedman notes the way H.D. combines Freud's analytic terminology with her own rhetoric. She notes that: "H.D. paired [Freud's] word 'symptom' with her own 'inspiration,' a word choice that vividly contrasts their different purposes in their collaboration to decode the unconscious [. . .] As 'signs' rather than 'symptoms,' these visions brought messages that could reaffirm her belief in and her knowledge of 'highest truth.'" ¹⁰⁷ Friedman marks out a very important distinction between Freudian analysis and H.D.'s integration of analysis into her writing and analysis of herself. The pairing of the word 'symptom' with 'inspiration' changes the implications in the process of a 'cure' in analysis. 'Symptom' implies a degeneration or failure, something is not working or functioning properly which causes the body or mind to break down and exhibit 'symptoms' of this failure. These 'symptoms' are used in

¹⁰⁷ Friedman, *Psyche Reborn*, p. 101.

analysis both to diagnose and cure. In pairing 'symptom' with 'inspiration,' H.D. suggests that the ailment can lead towards a greater understanding of self and/or her art: a breakthrough instead of a breakdown. Inspirations, as opposed to symptoms, in H.D.'s interpretation, lead to a questioning, a path, a desirable search for truth and a notion of self.

H.D.'s belief in the power of inspiration is evident throughout the text, particularly in regards to the "writing on the wall" she sees in Greece. She argues that Freud understands her most "dangerous 'symptom'" (41) to be the "writing-on-the-wall" that she sees in Corfu at the end of April 1920. H.D. describes the images she sees projected onto her hotel wall as "colorless transfers" (45). The first image is the torso of a person who she imagines may be her brother, for he had recently died in the war (45). The second image is of a goblet or cup, which she imagines representing the "mystic chalice" (45) and the third is a simple design of two entwined circles. Although the images lend themselves to various interpretations, H.D. does not offer any particular ones to her reader. She is more interested in how Freud understands these images to be "dangerous symptoms" rather than what each one stands for individually.

H.D. connects the "writing on the wall" with her earlier experiences, suggesting that they are all interrelated and connected to her sessions with Freud: "But there I am seated on the old-fashioned Victorian sofa in the Greek island hotel bedroom, and here I am reclining on the couch in the Professor's room, telling him this, and here again am I, ten years later, seated at my desk in my own room in London [. . .] Here is this hieroglyph of the unconscious or subconscious of the Professor's discovery and life-study, the hieroglyph actually in operation before our

very eyes. But it is no easy matter to sustain this mood, this 'symptom' or this inspiration" (47). In this example, H.D. has created a 'third scene' which replaces/displaces the original 'primary' scene of her analysis with Freud. She suggests that this earlier event inspires her interest in analysing her impressions, or in this case, her visions. In this way H.D. pairs her "inspiration" with Freud's "symptom" and his analysis of these visions with her own. The only consistency in the "no clock-time" (47) of H.D.'s impressions is H.D.: she fixes herself at the horizon of the past, the present and the future.

H.D.'s "writing on the wall" or "dangerous symptoms," as Freud diagnoses them, refer the reader back to H.D.'s visit to Corfu with Bryher in 1919-1920 and also make reference to her notebooks from this time period, later titled *Notes on Thoughts and Vision*. It is no coincidence that these notebooks are a recording of H.D.'s theories on the psyche, what she terms the "over-mind" or 'jelly-fish consciousness' (19). In her *Notes*, H.D. imagines the "over-mind" as a sort of hat, a "cap of consciousness," (18) that hovers over the head. She extends this metaphor to suggest that long feelers, like tentacles, extend from the "over-mind" down around the body. According to her model, the centre of consciousness shifts between the brain and the "love-region" of the body (19-20). She argues that vision arises in two ways: from the brain and from the womb or love-region which she believes to be responsible for the majority of dreams and visions (20). H.D. implies that women are more able to have visions and dreams because of their womb, although she does offer the 'love region' as a male counterpoint. She does not explicitly sex this difference, but the emphasis on the womb implies that women are more inclined to experience visions than men.

Referring back to the “writing on the wall” in her hotel room in Greece, H.D. constructs an alternative way to read her analytic sessions with Freud. She suggests that there were early signs or visions that led to her meetings with Freud. In this way, she further develops her role as prophetess or visionary and their meetings as part of a fated or destined happening. In the beginning she refers to the possibility that she is meant to be Freud’s heir, a possibility she develops through her ‘difference’ from the other people in Freud’s life, and through the similarity in their methodology. In connecting her visions with her analytic sessions, H.D. not only establishes her unique position in regards to Freud but suggests that she has something to offer his way of thinking that can and will change the face of psychoanalysis.

One of the clearest examples of H.D.’s desire to establish her own interpretation of the psyche appears in a dream she has about an Egyptian princess, a Pharaoh’s daughter. It is not surprising that H.D. chooses an Egyptian princess to associate with herself. Her interest in Egyptian and Greek mythology is present in much of her work. She is introduced as “a fair young Greek revisiting earth” in one collection of her poetry.¹⁰⁸ In the dream she narrates to Freud, a princess walks down a long, marble staircase that leads to a river bank and to a small child who lies in a basket or ark. H.D. admits that this dream comes from a picture she adored as a child, entitled “Moses in the Bulrushes,” and yet she implies that its implications extend beyond childhood memories. In her dream analysis, H.D. asks: “Do I wish myself, in the deepest unconscious or subconscious layers of my being, to be the founder of a new religion?” (37). Again H.D. distances herself from her desires, this time by phrasing them in terms of a question. Posing this secret desire in the context

¹⁰⁸ Hughes Mearns, “Introduction,” in *H.D. The Pamphlet Poets* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1926), pp. 5-6.

of a question allows her to introduce the possibility without committing to the task of actually finding a “new religion.”

Perhaps more interesting than her veiled desire to find a “new religion,” is the way she frames her dream analysis within an Oedipal triangle with Freud as father, H.D. as mother, and her dream as child: “A girl-child, a doll, an aloof and silent father form this triangle, this family romance, this trinity which follows the recognised religious pattern: *Father*, aloof, distant, the provider, the protector – but a little un-get-at-able, a little too far away and giant-like in proportion, a little chilly withal; *Mother*, a virgin, the Virgin, that is, an untouched child, adoring, with faith, building a dream, and the dream is symbolized by the third member of the trinity, the *Child*, the doll in her arms” (38). Instead of imagining herself as the child, or daughter to Freud, as some may expect or even theorise, H.D. imagines herself in the role of mother and therefore as wife to Freud. Interestingly she writes in the very beginning of her *Tribute*: “I said I had not met the Frau Professor but had heard that she was the perfect wife for him and there couldn’t be – could there?-- a greater possible compliment” (3). I am not suggesting here that H.D. wanted to be Freud’s wife, for that position was taken; however, what is implied in her dream analysis as well as in her attempts to construct a symmetry between them, is that she desires to be his compliment, his Other, and for the two of them to work together to create her dream (child).

A “WORDLESS CHALLENGE”¹⁰⁹

H.D. imagines the relationship between herself and Freud as one of difference

¹⁰⁹ H.D., *Tribute to Freud*, p. 99.

and similarity; they are separate and yet connected. She describes their interaction with the phrase “wordless challenge,” a phrase that expresses both the silent and perhaps psychic exchanges between them, as well as the effect H.D. imagines her presence has on Freud. She outlines the “wordless challenge” as follows: “The wordless challenge goes on, ‘You are a very great man. I am overwhelmed with embarrassment, I am shy and frightened and gauche as an over-grown school-girl. But listen. You are a man. Yofi is a dog. I am a woman. If this dog and this woman ‘take’ to one another, it will prove that beyond your caustic implied criticism – if criticism it is – there is another region of cause and effect, another region of question and answer” (99). H.D.’s “wordless challenge” can be rephrased to read: I am a woman, and although I may be shy and scared in the presence of someone I admire and respect, I will not abandon my own set of beliefs in order to conform to yours. For you are a man, not a God. And you need to listen to what I have to offer you, because there is another way of understanding the unconscious, another way to cure the psyche, and I have discovered something, something that I have brought for you to understand and learn.

H.D.’s “wordless challenge” is a central focus in H.D.’s *Tribute*. It is a demand that Freud listen to what she envisions. H.D. demands that Freud listen to what she has to say by reconstructing their meeting with each other. Returning to these ‘scenes’ through writing allows her to turn the scene of analysis around. In doing so she proposes another way of recognising each other, another way of analysing for the ‘truth,’ one that is complimentary to psychoanalysis.

H.D.’s vision involves recognition of the separate but connected forces in life and death. She represents her understanding of dualistic thinking with her ‘signet.’

the figure of the thistle and the serpent. In a way similar to the “writing on the wall,” H.D. frames her discovery of the thistle and serpent in connection with Freud. She suggests, once again, that she was destined to meet him at some point and knew this at an early age. She begins her explanation of how she first encounters the thistle and serpent by writing: “I did not know exactly *who* he was and yet it seems very obvious now” (64). In doing so, H.D. emphasises their interconnected lives. She first imagines the image of the thistle and the serpent in a dream she has when she is eighteen or nineteen. At the time she tells her closest friend, Ezra Pound, who convinces her that her dream is a flashback from the past or a prophesy of the future. He also connects the image with “Asklepios, the ‘blameless physician’” (65) the name she later gives to Freud in the dedication to *Tribute*: “To Sigmund Freud: blameless physician.”

H.D. weaves the image of the thistle and serpent through the important events in her life in order to signify its relevance to her relationship with Freud. She sees the thistle and serpent in the Louvre during her travels to Europe and in Corfu, when she sees the “writing on the wall.” Most importantly, she sees the thistle and serpent within Freud’s collection of statues and objects on his desk. However, H.D. does not tell Freud about this image and its importance to her life when she finds it amongst his favourite pieces. For H.D. this private discovery is a confirmation that she is meant to meet Freud as well as a ‘sign’ that she and Freud have a unique relationship with each other.

She emphasises this connection with a small digression into the linguistic etymology of the word “signet.” She writes: “Sign again – a word, gesture, symbol, or mark intended to signify something else. Sign again – (medical) a symptom,

(astronomical) one of the twelve parts of the Zodiac. Again sign – to attach a signature to, and sign-post – a direction post”(66). Musing on the word “sign,” H.D. pairs the psychoanalytic usage with a creative and artistic one (‘symptom’ with ‘inspiration’) as well as suggesting the way different, and even opposing, interpretations can be contained within one word.

In his introductory essay to H.D.’s *Notes on Thought and Vision*, entitled “The Thistle and the Serpent,” Albert Gelpi describes H.D.’s signet as, “not separate and antagonistic, but paired,”¹¹⁰ and an “essential contradiction and connection.”¹¹¹ Gelpi’s interpretation applies not only to H.D.’s thistle and serpent signet but also to her approach to psychoanalysis through her relationship with Freud. Although they are very different from each other, what H.D. stresses in her *Tribute* is that there is also an inherent connection between them. Through her examples, such as the “writing on the wall” and the symbol of the thistle and serpent, H.D. suggests that fate destines their meeting and by writing these experiences in her *Tribute* she ensures that they will remain connected.

One problem worth noting in H.D.’s vision of a ‘new religion’ in *Tribute to Freud* is that the recognition she imagines only happens through her impressions and construction of a secondary analytic scene. The absence of Freud’s work from *Tribute to Freud* places stress on Freud as a man, rather than Freud as the founder of psychoanalysis. In describing Freud as a ‘man’ not analyst, H.D. can facilitate recognition between them. Through her analysis of events and of her position in relation to Freud, she can imagine the possibility of a recognition that places her on a

¹¹⁰ Albert Gelpi, “The Thistle and the Serpent,” in the introduction to H.D.’s, *Notes on Thought and Vision and the Wise Sappho* (San Francisco, City Lights Books, 1982), p. 13.

¹¹¹ Gelpi, “The Thistle and the Serpent,” p. 14.

level footing with Freud, however her relationship remains within her poetic vision, not in discourse with Freud. As Miller argues, H.D. is always analyst to a dead analysand.

"DIALECTICS OF RECOGNITION"¹¹²

In her *Notes on Thought and Vision* H.D. argues that: "We must be 'in love' before we can understand the mysteries of vision [. . .] We begin with sympathy of thought. The minds of the two lovers merge, interact in sympathy of thought" (22). H.D.'s vision of recognition between man and woman 'in love' anticipates Irigaray's most recent work in *I Love to You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*. Drawing from her work on sexual difference and influenced by her re-reading of Hegel, Irigaray imagines a felicity in history contingent on the possibility of recognition between the sexes. Her argument centres on a relation between man and woman that encourages a positive form of recognition. She writes: "Recognition is the act that could enable the hierarchical domination between the sexes to be overcome, which could restore woman and man, women and men, to their respective identity and dignity, and which should bring about relations that are cultured, spiritual and not merely natural; relations founded upon a form of indirection or intransitivity. And so: I love to you, rather than: I love you."¹¹³ Through recognition, Irigaray suggests that it is possible to be in a dialectical relationship that is not all encompassing, nor possessive; instead it encourages dialogue and discourse.

¹¹² The phrase 'dialectics of recognition' comes from reading Luce Irigaray's *I Love to You* and Hélène Cixous's "First Names of No One," *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 33.

¹¹³ Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*, trans. Alison Martin (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 101-102.

Irigaray outlines her understanding of recognition in order to clarify that she does not intend for 'man' and 'woman' to become interchangeable or reducible to each other. Part of the recognition she envisions includes a distinct sexed identity, which she terms a "generic identity."¹¹⁴ Before outlining the problems with Irigaray's model, it is important to clarify the way she imagines this relationship between man and woman will function. Statements such as: "I go towards that which enables me to become while remaining myself,"¹¹⁵ underline the separate and yet connected movement between the 'I' and the 'You' in Irigaray's vision. Instead of constructing a union between man and woman in which one becomes part of the other, Irigaray formulates a dialectical relationship between the sexes which encourages communication, not hierarchy.

Irigaray's sketch for a recognition between the sexes contains many similarities to H.D.'s "wordless challenge" to Freud as well as to the ideas H.D. puts forward in her *Notes on Thought and Vision*. For example, H.D. writes: "These jelly-fish, I think, are the 'seeds cast into the ground.' But as it takes a man and woman to create another life, so it takes these two forms of seed, one in the head and one in the body to make a new spiritual birth" (50). H.D. harks to nature and the laws of procreation to theorise a dialectical relationship between man and woman in which each come together to create a "new spiritual birth." "Spiritual" because in H.D.'s vision this will not be a child, but a dream, a new way of thinking that is born of opposite and yet connected forces.

In both Irigaray's and H.D.'s model of recognition, 'man' and 'woman' are distinct and separate individuals. Their union is not designed to make them 'whole'

¹¹⁴ Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 65.

¹¹⁵ Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 104.

or 'one' rather it is to bring together difference in order to produce something from the encounter. *Tribute to Freud* frames a meeting of this kind, to repeat H.D.'s words: "[Freud and I] had come together in order to substantiate something" (13). By returning to their analytic sessions as well as to events H.D. constructs as linked to Freud, such as the symbol of the thistle and the serpent, she constructs a recognition between herself and Freud in language.

H.D.'s and Irigaray's sketch for recognition is dependent upon sexual difference. As Irigaray writes: "Only the recognition of the other as sexed offers this possibility."¹¹⁶ Sexing the recognition sets up limitations for the possibilities both envision. For example, situating a recognition between man and woman locates the possibility for a happy history within a heterosexual framework. Arguments against Irigaray's tendency to situate her theories within a heterosexual matrix have been argued in particular by Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell.¹¹⁷

Introducing recognition between a 'man' and a 'woman' also implies that there is such a thing as *a* man or *a* woman. As mentioned in the last chapter, Irigaray is often criticised for her tendency to essentialise the position of woman in her theoretical formulations. She fails to problematise her construction of a "generic female identity" or to engage with arguments such as Diane Elam's in *Feminism and Deconstruction: Ms. en Abyme* which open up the question of woman and explore the impossibility of defining woman conclusively.

Although H.D. does not call for a generic 'man' or 'woman' in her *Notes on Thought and Vision*, as Irigaray's recognition does, she does stress the importance of

¹¹⁶ Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 105.

¹¹⁷ See also "The Future of Sexual Difference: An Interview with Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell," Pheng Cheah and Elizabeth Grosz, *Diacritics* 28.1 (1998), pp. 19-42.

“womb” vision over “vision of the brain” (20). As discussed before, H.D. argues that vision arises from two places: the brain and the womb (20). Although she does add a “corresponding love-region of a man’s body” (20) to counter the importance she places on the womb she still maintains that “the majority of dream and of ordinary vision is vision of the womb” (21). The distinction H.D. draws is subtle and can be read as inconsequential. However, considering the stress psychoanalysis places on the role of the Phallus, I would argue that H.D. is trying to establish a way in which women are equal to men (if not better) in their ability to understand the “mysteries of vision” (22).

H.D. needs to determine a way to read men and women as equal in order to suggest that their union will lead to a greater understanding of life and death. Like Irigaray’s recognition, H.D.’s vision relies on a heterosexual union; her vision for spiritual knowledge is predicated upon a mental union between man and woman. She argues that “We must be ‘in love’ before we can understand the mysteries of vision,” (22) the “we” implicating ‘man’ and ‘woman.’ In other words, the key to the “mysteries of vision” can only be unlocked by a “sympathy of thought” between the sexes. Like Irigaray’s “I Love to You,” H.D.’s idea is based on a recognition of love and mutual understanding.

PART TWO: FEMINIST CRITICISM OF H.D.’S *TRIBUTE TO FREUD*

Before we, as feminists, jump to pull together the threads of a new feminist analysis in H.D.’s works, it is important to consider the way in which we would be reinscribing ourselves into another restrictive framework. Instead of trying to glean through H.D.’s texts in order to discover what we may imagine to be a ‘true’ or ‘real’

feminist form of analysis, or to use H.D. as a representative of feminism to re-read Freud's patriarchal influence on her, I suggest that we find in *Tribute to Freud* a possibility for recognition that may help us to move beyond 'us' and 'them' arguments in feminism and psychoanalysis. As H.D. writes in *Notes on Thought and Vision*: "My sign-posts are not yours, but if I blaze my own trail, it may help to give you confidence and urge you out of the murky, dead, old, thousand-times explored old world, the dead world of overworked emotions and thoughts" (24). In order to get out of the "murky, dead, old, thousand-times explored old world" it is necessary to confront and recognise the limitations placed on alternative approaches without reinscribing ourselves within new restrictions. One way of doing so is to investigate the feminist criticism of *Tribute to Freud* in order to examine the ways in which it simultaneously limits and expands the possibilities of reading feminism and psychoanalysis together.

DESIRE IN TRANSFERENCE

Throughout my reading of *Tribute to Freud*, I have made references to Susan Stanford Friedman's texts as they comprise an authoritative and exhaustive body of criticism on H.D.'s writing. Friedman's work is particularly influential to feminist interpretations of H.D.'s work, as earlier criticisms often pay more attention to the effect male writers, such as Ezra Pound and D.H. Lawrence, have on H.D.'s work rather than acknowledging her own contribution.¹¹⁸ Friedman's work is part of earlier feminist projects that read for a distinct feminist subjectivity in order to establish a writer such as H.D. in her own right. A project such as Friedman's is an essential

¹¹⁸ For example, see also Joseph Riddel, "H.D.'s Scene of Writing- Poetry as (and) Analysis," *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 12.1 (1979), pp. 41-59.

part of moving beyond criticism that reduces women writers to their relations to male writers, and yet her criticism inscribes its own restrictions and limitations even in its emancipatory intentions.

Friedman's work on H.D. is largely developed through *Psyche Reborn: the Emergence of H.D.* and *Penelope's Web: Gender, Modernity, H.D.'s Fiction*. The title references to Greek mythology, to the interwoven style of H.D.'s writing, and to the idea of rebirth capture some of central issues in Friedman's criticism of H.D.'s writing. The scope of this project cannot adequately consider each argument Friedman develops, so I will focus in particular on a chapter from *Penelope's Web* entitled "Desire: Working through the Maternal," as it demonstrates the way Friedman becomes like an analyst to H.D.

Friedman suggests that the "new religion" H.D. desires and hints towards in *Tribute to Freud* is authorised by her identification with Freud-as-father, but emerges from her desire for Freud-as-Mother.¹¹⁹ As she argues: "Freud-as-Mother brought back to the daughter what had been lost under the Law of the Father: the primal Mother of the daughter's pre-Oedipal desire."¹²⁰ To construct her reading of H.D.'s maternal transference, Friedman draws heavily on an intertext between *Tribute to Freud*, "Advent," and H.D.'s letters to her companion Francis Bryher.¹²¹ She argues that there is a measurable degree of intimacy or honesty in these works, from *Tribute* as the most public account and H.D.'s letters as the most private. Friedman reads these works together as proof that H.D. is working through a maternal transference as well as through her lesbian desire. She tells her readers that "clues exist in *Advent*"

¹¹⁹ Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, p. 313.

¹²⁰ Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, p. 313.

¹²¹ Friedman concentrates more on the autobiographical half of *Tribute to Freud* entitled "Advent."

but, as she goes on to write, "[H.D.'s] letters to Bryher are explicit."¹²²

Friedman reads through a paternal and maternal transference between H.D. and Freud, situating H.D. as a daughter to Freud the father-mother. According to Friedman, Freud becomes the parent H.D. never had, enabling her creative process as well as encouraging her to think through her "new religion."¹²³ Theorising H.D. as daughter to the parental Freud places H.D. in a position where she is always learning from Freud and always curbed by his authority and experience. Maintaining H.D. in the position of daughter also inhibits recognition from taking place. H.D.'s successes as daughter will always be read in terms of how they reflect Freud as parent not in terms of how they may effect Freud as a thinker. In other words, if H.D. is Freud's daughter then she is limited by the dynamics of the Oedipal constructs; she is always in resistance or acting in relation to her desire, as Friedman theorises, instead of acting on her own terms. Although it is clear through her work that Friedman wants to establish H.D.'s subjectivity or her independence from Freud, by placing H.D. in the role of Freud's daughter she does not succeed in doing so.

Friedman's emphasis on a maternal transference also implies that H.D.'s desire for her mother masks her lesbian desire, an analysis that stems directly from Freud's theorisation of lesbianism in "Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman."¹²⁴ In his essay, Freud argues that lesbians refuse to accept their own castration or their mother's and "love other women as a way of returning to the Pre-Oedipal stage of desire."¹²⁵ Friedman links Freud's theories with H.D.'s writing, drawing particular attention to the letters H.D. wrote Francis Bryher.

¹²² Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, p.319.

¹²³ Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, pp. 327-328.

¹²⁴ See Freud, *Case Histories II: The "Rat" man, Schreber, A Case of Female Homosexuality*, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

However, the letters to which Friedman refers have largely been altered by Bryher's editing. Friedman suggests that Bryher wanted to edit out H.D.'s references to orgasm over the "Mother/Lover"¹²⁶ image that is implied in what remains of H.D.'s letters. As Friedman writes: "For posterity, Bryher may well have preferred that H.D.'s desire for the Mother/Lover remain in the 'pure mythological state' of the textual dream, with its erotic consequences in 'real' orgasm erased."¹²⁷ Although Friedman's analysis is plausible, it relies on the assumptions she makes of both H.D.'s and Bryher's desires. Because Bryher did cut out certain sections, Friedman's textual analysis relies heavily on conjecture and therefore it is difficult to substantiate. It is also problematic to use letters as means for analysis. Again Miller's critique comes to mind: Friedman becomes analyst to a dead analysand.

Friedman's examination of H.D.'s letters impose Freud's analysis and in so doing, retrieve secret desires that may or may not have been there to begin with. In doing so, Friedman becomes what Shoshana Felman calls a "Freudian critic," in that she fills in the missing words of H.D.'s prose with the solution of sexual desire.¹²⁸ As Felman argues in "Turning the Screw of Interpretation," the "Freudian critic" pulls answers from an imagined hiding place, "not so much to give an answer *to* the text as to answer *for* the text."¹²⁹ By reading H.D.'s prose as confirmation of both a maternal transference and lesbian desire, Friedman offers an answer *for* the text as it appears no question has really been posed by the text.

Perhaps more problematic than reading H.D.'s maternal transference as a

¹²⁵ Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, p. 320.

¹²⁶ Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, pp. 321-322.

¹²⁷ Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, p. 322.

¹²⁸ Shoshana Felman, "Turning the Screw of Interpretation," pp. 104-105.

¹²⁹ Felman, "Turning the Screw of Interpretation," p. 105.

symptom of lesbian desire is Friedman's suggestion that H.D.'s desire for her mother is "the development of a gynopoetic empowered by the Mother/Muse."¹³⁰ Friedman argues that H.D.'s writing is an expression of her desire for the lost Mother.¹³¹ In doing so she sets up an alternative reading of H.D. and Freud's relationship as one governed by gynocentric rules instead of patriarchal ones. However, imagining Freud as mother instead of father does not change Freud's role as authorising and mediating H.D.'s creative process. Freud is still placed in a position of authority in relation to his daughter H.D.

Friedman implies that by changing the structure from a patriarchal to a matriarchal arrangement she is giving H.D. a feminist framework for her writing. She may in fact be doing this; however, in associating Freud with a mother figure as opposed to a father figure, H.D. is no more independent or unrestricted by the desire of her parent(s). In changing Freud from father to mother, Friedman is still attributing H.D.'s creative success to Freud's influence, in this case to his analysis of her maternal transference. As Friedman argues: "By decoding her love of Greece and the Greek islands as a desire for the pre-Oedipal Mother, Freud had facilitated the feminisation of her most potent symbol of creative inspiration."¹³² *Feminising* a work does not necessarily mean that it becomes *feminist*. In the case of H.D., whether or not Freud is her 'mother' or her 'father,' he is not in a position to recognise the extent to which her work can affect psychoanalysis.

Linking H.D.'s writing with a pre-Oedipal desire for the "Lost Mother/Muse," Friedman connects H.D.'s prose with a pre-discursive lack. Despite her intentions to

¹³⁰ Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, p. 322.

¹³¹ Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, p. 326.

¹³² Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, p. 326.

move H.D.'s writing away from patriarchal or reductive readings, Friedman's use of psychoanalytic theories reinscribe H.D.'s writing and desire back into a limiting and restrictive framework. Using gynocentric logic is only the counterpoint to using a phallogocentric or patriarchal logic, and therefore not necessarily capable of recognising the multi-layered possibilities in H.D.'s writing.

FREUD AND H.D. AS "WE"

Instead of imagining Freud in the role of parent to H.D., Dianne Chisholm's work in *H.D.'s Freudian Poetics: Psychoanalysis in Translation* examines the possibility of a 'we' or "intertext"¹³³ between H.D. and Freud. The difference between the 'we' she imagines between H.D. and Freud and the recognition I have suggested earlier, is that in her reading one stands in for the other as opposed to imagining them each as separate identities. Chisholm cogently argues for a re-reading of Freud and H.D. in terms of translation. In her reading of *Tribute to Freud* she offers "the first full-length reading of the intertext 'H.D.-Freud,' or what [she] call [s] H.D.'s translation of Freud."¹³⁴ That is to say, that Chisholm reads H.D. and Freud "side by side in search of interimplications,"¹³⁵ a reading that demonstrates the possibilities that reading 'side by side' offers.¹³⁶ Chisholm distinguishes her work from other feminist criticisms of H.D.'s writing both in her approach and in the way she imagines the "intertext" between H.D. and Freud.

Chisholm takes a passage from *Tribute to Freud* in particular to demonstrate the 'we' that she believes exists between H.D. and Freud. The excerpt reads: "We can

¹³³ Chisholm, *Freudian Poetics*, p. 1.

¹³⁴ Chisholm, *Freudian Poetics*, p. 1.

¹³⁵ Chisholm, *Freudian Poetics*, p. 2.

¹³⁶ Chisholm derives her readings from Felman's essay "Turning the Screw of Interpretation."

read my writing, the fact that there was writing, in two ways or more than two ways. We can translate it as a suppressed desire for forbidden 'signs and wonders,' breaking bounds, a suppressed desire to be a Prophetess, to be important anyway, megalomania they call it – a hidden desire to 'found a new religion' which the Professor ferreted out in the later Moses picture" (51). In this passage, H.D. points towards the multi-layered aspect of her writing as well as towards the multiple interpretations it solicits. For Chisholm, the 'we' is a signpost for the interdependency between Freud and H.D.: "This process of writing, reading, translating is emphatically collective: the 'we' who engage in the process are H.D. *and* Freud. Neither functions without the other: it is H.D.'s dream text that is read in the light of Freud's dream interpretation."¹³⁷ Chisholm also argues that the 'we' includes the reader in a subversive reading of the text in which Freud authorises H.D.'s repressed desires to be a Prophetess, allowing her to consider her megalomaniac ambitions. As she explains: "Freud collaborates in authorizing her dream of writing visionary poetry, a kind of 'projective verse' that has the capacity to signify more than merely the neurosis or nostalgia of a modern, discontented ego."¹³⁸

There is evidence in *Tribute to Freud* to support Chisholm's argument of interdependency between H.D. and Freud. For example, H.D. writes: "'Look,' I would say to this Kindly Being, 'those two on your shelf there – just make the slightest alteration of the hour-glasses. Put H.D. in the place of Sigmund Freud (I will still have a few years left in which to tidy up my not very important affairs)'" (74). She suggests that she would trade her life for his. But this gesture seems more Romantic than proof of their interdependency. And it is H.D. sacrificing herself for

¹³⁷ Chisholm, *Freudian Poetics*, p. 10.

¹³⁸ Chisholm, *Freudian Poetics*, p. 11.

Freud. Would Freud do the same?

In order to counter Chisholm's analysis of a 'we' between H.D. and Freud, I will add Jacques Derrida's suggestion in *Resistances of Psychoanalysis* that "This logico-grammatical modality seems interesting because, among other things, it is always me who says 'we'; it is always 'I' who utters 'we,' supposing thereby, in effect, in the asymmetrical structure of the utterance, the other to be absent, dead, in any case incompetent, or even arriving too late to object."¹³⁹ In Derrida's analysis, unlike Chisholm's, the 'we', far from implying a collective understanding, implies a singular and perhaps predatory relationship to the act of interpreting. Following Derrida's analysis of 'we,' H.D. is not participating in a dual reading of her own words; instead she is revising the analysis in the full knowledge that Freud will be too late to object. "The one signs for the other," as Derrida suggests. Chisholm's critique, like other feminist critiques of H.D.'s work, attempts to establish H.D. on an equal par with Freud. The notion of translation places H.D. and Freud in an equal, but also an interdependent relationship. In such a relationship, as Derrida suggests in his analysis of 'we,' one will always sign for the other, one will always possess the other, thereby negating the possibility of an egalitarian correspondence.

Chisholm's 'we' operates differently from a recognition between H.D. and Freud. And yet, each depends upon the return H.D. makes to her analytic experiences with Freud. Following Diane Elam's model of the "ms. en abyme" allows us to think of H.D. and Freud as infinitely receding the other's grasp. They are neither subject nor object to each other; rather they are caught in a play between the two positions.

¹³⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 43.

H.D. AND FREUD

Claire Buck's work in *H.D. and Freud: Bisexuality and a Feminine Discourse*, revises and builds upon Friedman's feminist criticism in order to problematise feminist readings of H.D.'s work. Whilst Friedman argues for H.D.'s status as a woman writer (amongst many other cogent ideas), Buck investigates the model(s) of the self that H.D. constructs through her writing.¹⁴⁰ Buck's approach is interdisciplinary. She interweaves feminist theory and psychoanalysis with H.D.'s writings, claiming that "H.D.'s writing is exemplary of the question which psychoanalysis has posed both women and feminism since the 1970's."¹⁴¹ The 'question' as Buck refers to it is really a series of questions raised within feminist revisions of Freudian psychoanalysis, questions that revolve around the reception of theories such as the castration and the Oedipus complexes.

Buck argues that early feminist work on H.D., such as Friedman's, demonstrates how H.D. could make use of Freud's theories on sexuality and subjectivity (amongst other conceptual issues) without relegating herself to the position of lack that the castration complex insists upon.¹⁴² However, Buck argues, as I have, that Friedman's argument is predicated on a system that is itself heavily invested in phallogentric logic. Buck points out that in readings which counterpose woman as defined by lack to woman defined as whole are one in the same: "The dependence of both readings on the same structure prevents either argument from successfully countering the other."¹⁴³ This circular logic does not liberate feminist

¹⁴⁰ Claire Buck, *H.D. and Freud: Bisexuality and a Feminine Discourse* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 3.

¹⁴¹ Buck, *H.D. and Freud*, p. 98.

¹⁴² Buck, *H.D. and Freud*, p. 98.

¹⁴³ Buck, *H.D. and Freud*, p. 100.

readings on H.D. from conservative (and by some accounts, anti-feminist) readings; it only moves the reader in a circle from one side to the other. Arguing against phallogentric logic by using it only strengthens its dominance.

Whereas I agree with Buck's analysis, I do not necessarily agree with her 'solution' – a word I put in brackets as I am not suggesting that Buck sees Lacanian theory as a cure for a structural dependency on psychoanalysis, but rather as one answer. Buck suggests that Lacanian psychoanalysis can offer a new approach to reductive arguments. As she writes: "It is here that I would argue that Lacanian theory, with all its problems, remains important for feminist work on sexual difference."¹⁴⁴ Buck argues that by positing sexual difference in the field of representation, the intersection between H.D.'s work and psychoanalysis can move beyond the binary oppositions of lack and wholeness.¹⁴⁵ Diane Elam's "ms. en abyme," with its unique feminist slant, helps to problematise the 'answer' Buck imagines she finds within Lacanian theory.

The "ms. en abyme," as discussed earlier, upsets any direct correspondence between subject and object in the field of representation. This model is particularly important in light of feminist politics as it does not insist on woman as a stable subject or object, for each position carries its own limitations and restrictions. Instead of declaring that "woman does not exist," as Lacan does in *Encore*, and as discussed in the first chapter, we, as theorists, can leave woman "both determined and yet to be determined."¹⁴⁶ Using the model of the "ms. en abyme" to think through the relationship between H.D. and Freud allows us to move beyond static definitions of

¹⁴⁴ Buck, *H.D. and Freud*, p. 100.

¹⁴⁵ Buck, *H.D. and Freud*, pp. 100-101.

¹⁴⁶ Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction*, p. 27.

analyst and analysand or, as Buck mentions, beyond the binary opposition of lack and wholeness, without inscribing the intersection between H.D. and Freud within another phallogentric logic (Lacan's).

Buck argues that *Tribute to Freud* offers a reading of what it is like to be engaged in the process of defining and understanding the role of woman or femininity in psychoanalysis. H.D.'s text does not offer meaning or answers, according to Buck, rather, she offers her readers a work-in-progress.¹⁴⁷ Buck suggests that "In *Tribute to Freud* the representation of the analytic scene itself dramatises the processes of reading as relationships of desire in which psychoanalysis loses its own position of mastery as a reader of a feminine text of gaps, holes and lacks."¹⁴⁸ Although I would agree that what H.D. offers her readers is a 'work-in-progress' and a dramatisation of the reading of desire, I would not go so far as to suggest, as Buck does here, that these readings destabilise the mastery of psychoanalysis. Instead I would argue that the conception of 'one' reading or 'one' meaning in the account H.D. offers is destabilised. The possibility of multiple readings negates the possibility of *any* one reading. And so, it is not only psychoanalysis that loses its mastery, but also a purely feminist reading. What H.D. leaves us with is not a victory for feminism over a dominant psychoanalysis, but ambivalence towards the possibility of any one meaning, reading, or notion of 'truth.'

In Buck's argument as well as in Friedman's and Chisholm's, there is a desire to make wider claims for feminism through H.D.'s interaction with Freud in her *Tribute*. It is difficult to resist trying to read a new way of approaching the precarious relationship between feminism and psychoanalysis in the encounter between a

¹⁴⁷ Buck, *H.D. and Freud*, p. 100-102.

¹⁴⁸ Buck, *H.D. and Freud*, p. 102.

woman writer and the 'founding father' of psychoanalysis, particularly given the problematic history between psychoanalysis and feminism. My own reading demonstrates a similar impulse to find a way of bringing the two writers together, of theorising a way of moving beyond the 'us' and 'them' arguments. However, perhaps what H.D.'s text performs most explicitly is the impossibility of any *one* reading of desire or any *one* analysis of the complex relationship between analyst and analysand.

H.D. gestures towards this indeterminacy by relating the analytic scene to a game. In "Advent," the more meditative account of H.D.'s sessions with Freud, she writes:

But it is true that we play puss-in-a-corner, find one angle and another or see things from different corners or sides of a room. Yes, we play hide-and-see, hunt-the-slipper, and hunt-the-thimble and patiently and meticulously patch together odds and ends of our picture-puzzle. We spell words upside down and backward and crosswise, for our crossword puzzle, and then again we run away and hide in the cellar or the attic or in our mother's clothes-closet. We play magnificent charades. But the Professor insisted I myself wanted to be Moses; not only did I want to be a boy but I wanted to be a hero (119-120).

Drawing a parallel between games such as "hide-and-see" and "hunt-the slipper," H.D. implies that analysis involves finding a hidden something or someone. Her analogy implies that psychoanalysis plays games, language games ("crossword puzzle"), in order to formulate an answer or to find the hidden secret of the analysand's desire. H.D. suggests that the scene of analysis

is like "charades;" Freud guesses what H.D. desires based on the signs she gives him and yet, as she adds, he continues to insist that she not only wants to be a boy but also a hero. An inherent part of H.D.'s text is to suggest that the scene between analyst and analysand is playful, indeterminate, and also naïve to alternative ways of understanding desire.

3. LACAN AND THE PAPIN SISTERS

H.D.'s suggestion that the game of hide-and-seek is analogous to the analytic scene reminds us, as readers, that in analysis there is something to be found. That 'something' is positioned in psychoanalytic interpretations as the 'truth.' Where there is a 'lack' there is also the implication of a 'truth' – to be found, discovered, uncovered – "unveiled," as Derrida would say.¹⁴⁹ Chapter Three demonstrates the way Lacan simultaneously constructs a 'gap' for 'truth' and fills it with desire.

This chapter begins with a selected examination of Jacques Lacan's early work, including excerpts from his doctoral thesis and an article entitled, "Motives of Paranoiac Crime: The Crime of the Papin Sisters." I have chosen to look at Lacan's work in particular because it is used frequently in feminist interpretations of issues such as identity, subjectivity, the body and desire. As discussed in the last chapter, feminist theorists such as Claire Buck turn to Lacanian theory for what they imagine to be an alternative way to theorise the aforementioned issues. "Motives of Paranoiac Crime: The Crime of the Papin Sisters," written by Lacan in 1933, is unique because it is not based on Lacan's clinical work, but on a cultural event that moved most of France. For this reason, as well as others, it is an ideal piece to consider and one that demonstrates both the desire to 'make sense' of 'woman' and of 'desire' as well as the impossibility of doing so.

¹⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida, "Le Facteur de la Vérité," *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 416.

The critical returns to Lacan's article, discussed in the second part of this chapter, demonstrate the way Lacan's critics behave as "Freudian critics," a term Shoshana Felman uses to explain how critics read for the 'truth' of a text and often answer with sexual desire. In critiques of Lacan's article, critics often look for the 'truth' in his work, thus giving him an authority he may not deserve. These critics also place the notion of sexual perversion at the forefront of their arguments. In the case of Lacan's article on the Papin sisters, critics pay more attention to the implicit lesbian desire than to the horror of the crime the sisters commit. In order to draw out these assertions, I will examine Jenny Holzer's project entitled *Lustmord*. Holzer's work in *Lustmord*, voices the position of the observer, the victim and the perpetrator in sexual crime. She also uses the body as a canvass in order to remind the viewer of the physicality in violence, a site critics of Lacan's article overlook in their analyses.

DESIRED READINGS

Lacan's interest in surrealism, 'madwomen' and their writing shape his approach to his doctoral work and to his analysis of the Papin sisters' case. His earlier work also develops a theoretical framework that becomes central to the interpretation of his influential "Mirror Theory." In her essay on women, surrealism and self-representation, Whitney Chadwick draws surrealism and psychoanalysis together believing they both hold the criminal, mad woman as a focal point of inspiration. As she argues: "The surrealists [. . .] were indebted to Freud's and Lacan's theories of the connection between vision and sexuality. The female visionary – childlike, criminal, or mad – became the central figure in both surrealism

and the emerging literature of psychoanalysis after World War I.”¹⁵⁰ As Chadwick points out, the intersection between surrealism and psychoanalysis converges on the figure of the mad or criminal woman, a figure that is a central focus in Lacan’s early work.

In one of his first publications,¹⁵¹ Lacan writes about a woman called “Marcelle C.” who Lacan diagnoses with “erotomania, paranoid delusions and mental automatism.”¹⁵² In his critical reading of Lacan’s work entitled *Lacan in Context*, David Macey draws a connection between Lacan’s work on “Marcelle C.” and surrealist concerns. He notes in his description of Lacan’s article that “a parallel is drawn between the writings of ‘Marcelle’ and the results obtained by the surrealists in their experiments with automatic writing.”¹⁵³ Lacan elaborates further on his study of “Marcelle C.” in an essay he writes for the surrealist journal the *Minotaure*, whose regular contributors include writers such as Paul Eluard and André Breton as well as work by artists such as Salvador Dalí, Pablo Picasso and Man Ray. Lacan’s article on “Marcelle C.,” entitled, “Le problème du style et les formes paranoïques de l’expérience,” develops his theories on paranoid writing and style. He uses writing from his patients such as “Marcelle C.” to theorise a paranoid style of writing, a theory he develops further in his doctoral thesis.

¹⁵⁰ Whitney Chadwick, “An Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors: Women, Surrealism and Self-Representation,” *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism and Self-Representation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), p. 9. There are several texts that interrogate the intersection between psychoanalysis and Surrealism, see also: Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co.: A History of Psychoanalysis in France 1925-1985*; David Macey, *Lacan in Context*; Christopher Lane, “The Delirium of Interpretation: Writing the Papin Affair,” in *Differences*, Vol.5, no.2 (1993), pp. 21-61; Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Catherine Clément, *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*.

¹⁵¹ “Ecrits ‘inspirés’: Schizographie,” co-authored with J. Lévi-Valensi and P. Rigault, *Annales Médico-Psychologiques*, December (1931); republished, PP, 365-82, citation taken from David Macey’s “Jacques-Maire Emile Lacan: *Curriculum Vitae* 1901-1981,” in *Lacan in Context*, p. 211.

¹⁵² Macey, *Lacan in Context*, p. 211.

¹⁵³ Macey, *Lacan in Context*, p. 211.

It is not surprising given Lacan's interest and collaborative work with surrealists such as Dalí and Breton that Lacan's doctoral thesis receives greater attention and interest from surrealist circles than from psychoanalytic circles.¹⁵⁴ The second part of Lacan's doctoral thesis, entitled "The case of Aimée, or self-punitive paranoia" (1932), reviews his case studies on Aimée, a name he takes from his patient's second novel. Aimée provides Lacan with the perfect opportunity to continue the work on paranoid writing that he begins with "Marcelle C.," as well as to develop his own style of writing, one largely inspired by those of his paranoid patients. As Catherine Clément contends in her influential *Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*: "[Lacan] learned a profound lesson from his paranoid female patients: in order to make oneself understood, it is sometimes necessary to play with a dangerously 'open' language."¹⁵⁵ There is an implicit suggestion in Clément's statement that Lacan's interest in these 'madwomen' is partly fuelled by his own desire to discover the secrets of their 'mad' style. That is, to be able to write as they do or to capture a certain amount of mystery within his own writing.

Lacan begins his doctoral work on Aimée following her arrest for attempted murder. He begins his case history with the following description of Aimée's attempt to kill Huguette Duflos,¹⁵⁶ a celebrated actress: "*The Assassination attempt*. On 10 April at eight o'clock in the evening Mme Z., a celebrated Parisian actress, [...] was accosted at the stage-door by a stranger, who asked her: 'Are you Mme Z?' When she replied in the affirmative, the stranger, according to Mme Z., assumed a different facial expression, quickly took a knife out of her handbag and, with a look of hatred,

¹⁵⁴ Macey, *Lacan in Context*, p. 212.

¹⁵⁵ Catherine Clément, *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, p. 59.

¹⁵⁶ In *Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, Catherine Clément confirms "Mme. Z.'s" identity as Huguette Duflos, p. 113.

raised her arm ready to strike her.”¹⁵⁷ Lacan writes the event in the style of a detective story or a murder mystery. He characterises Aimée as a deeply disturbed and calculating woman determined to seek her revenge on “Mme. Z.”

After her failed attempt at killing Duflos, Aimée is taken to the Saint-Anne asylum, under the care of Clérambault, Lacan’s supervisor.¹⁵⁸ Lacan uses Aimée’s writing, like he does with “Marcelle C.’s” to theorise reasons for her madness. In order to reach a diagnosis, he uses information taken from clinical intakes and, more important for this critique, the novels Aimée wrote before she was imprisoned.

At the time of her arrest, Aimée had written two novels which Lacan describes as “well-written.”¹⁵⁹ In his thesis, Lacan not only includes a plot synopsis of Aimée’s second novel, but also an excerpt from her novel, making her, in some ways, the famous writer she fantasised about becoming. Lacan’s thesis then not only contains his recording of events, but the materiality of Aimée’s novel. He includes his analysis of her ‘life’ story (case history) and her fictional story. In the excerpt Lacan includes, Aimée writes:

Coming out of the theatre one night I saw a procession go by. The main figure in this was an old hag whose thighs must have been entered by millions over the years. There she was with her retinue of parasites,

¹⁵⁷ Jacques Lacan, “The case of Aimée, or self-punitive paranoia,” (Second part, *Le cas Aimée ou la paranoïa d’auto-punition*, of *De la Psychose Paranoïaque dans ses Rapports avec la Personnalité*) (Paris: Le François) in *The Clinical Roots of the Schizophrenia Concept: Translations of Seminal European Contributions on Schizophrenia*, ed. by John Cutting and Michael Shepherd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 213-226, (p. 213).

¹⁵⁸ In *Downcast Eyes*, Jay argues that Lacan’s interest in vision most likely comes from Clérambault’s influence. He also notes that Clérambault “reserved his most dramatic visual act for the last. Having lost his eyesight through cataracts, he decided on November 17, 1934, to end his life. Sitting in an armchair in front of a mirror, he shot himself in the mouth,” p. 340.

¹⁵⁹ Lacan, “The Case of Aimée,” p.217. Lacan writes: “From a literary point of view the first is better than the second, but both are well written.”

procurers and pimps [. . .] I was told that this was how things went on round here [. . .] Poets came up one by one to talk to the old hag. Passers-by would grab hold of her thighs and the owner of the main newspaper in the city had his way with her in front of everyone. I couldn't go on. The procession stopped me. I asked people what the whole thing meant, but no one would tell me. It must be a secret of the theatre [. . .] It really is too crude, Madame, but you do it nonetheless. You would never regard it as sinful. The whole thing is like a flying brothel, the sort of thing you can buy in special bookshops.¹⁶⁰

There is something Bahktinian and carnivalesque in the images the narration evokes. The 'Madame,' whose "thighs have been entered by millions" is the spectacle of the show; one that is outside the theatre and staged in the narration, not the event itself. The narrator becomes an unknowing director, taking the old hag through this fantasy whilst claiming naivete and innocence for herself. She maintains that the "secret of the theatre" comes from outside; someone 'tells' her what happens. The fact that the narrator continues to look at the procession, although repulsed by what she sees, suggests both her disgust and attraction. Initially the reader is led to believe that the narrator can not go on looking at images, such as a man and woman having sex ("I couldn't go on") because of her own disgust. And yet this blocked passage is followed with the admission that it is because "the procession stopped me;" they limit her search for the meaning of the event, for the hidden "secret of the theatre." The procession is responsible for the boundaries that keep her from the knowledge she seeks. No one will give her answers although she is clearly asking questions.

¹⁶⁰ Lacan, "The Case of Aimée," p. 218.

Perhaps the knowledge she seeks can be found in the “special bookshops” she refers to at the end. These “special bookshops” are designed for the indulgence of pornographic or sexually explicit material, and yet shunned by the more ‘proper’ elements of society. The reference to “special bookshops” may remind the reader of different kinds of writing and reading, particularly those with a sexually explicit content. The allusion also draws attention to the location of this extreme and grotesque sexual desire in text; the texts in “special bookshops,” and the text of Aimée’s novel (not to mention the text of Lacan’s thesis). There is an implicit suggestion of a binary opposition between desires of attraction and repulsion; wanting to know more about this “secret of the theatre” and yet afraid to discover what it means.

The tension between the binary opposition of repulsion and attraction in the text may recall, for some readers, Hélène Cixous’s work in *The Newly Born Woman*. In “Sorties,” Cixous argues that writing contains the self and the other, both in harmony and in friction with each other. She writes: “Writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me – the other that I am and am not, that I don’t know how to be, but that I feel passing, that makes me live – that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me, who? – a feminine one, a masculine one, some? – several, some unknown, which is indeed what gives me the desire to know and from which all life soars. This peopling gives neither rest nor security, always disturbs the relationship to ‘reality,’ produces an uncertainty that gets in the way of the subject’s socialization. It is distressing, it wears you out; and for men this permeability, this non-exclusion is a threat, something intolerable.”¹⁶¹ If we apply

¹⁶¹ Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, pp. 85-86.

Cixous's argument to Aimée's text we can read the conflict of attraction and repulsion to represent the tension in her life, the struggle between her desire to be a writer, to have a sense of freedom, and the reality of her situation: mother of one child, married and employed by the railway station. The friction between what she desires to be and what she is may lead to the conflict Cixous suggests between something that makes you live and something that drives you apart.

Lacan recognises the tension between what Aimée is and what she wanted be; however, he reads the presence of an 'Other' in Aimée's writing as a manifestation of her desire for her ego ideal. He argues that Aimée, in striking the actress, Huguette Duflos, was in actuality striking her ego ideal and thus herself: "The sense of freedom and social ease which writers, actresses and women of the world reputedly possess were the very qualities which [Aimée] dreamt of obtaining. They were her ideal, and at the same time the object of her hate. In striking the actress, Aimée struck her externalised ideal, in the same way as someone driven by passion strikes the unique object of their hate and their love."¹⁶² It is possible that an uncertainty of identity leads Aimée to attack Huguette Duflos. Aimée's narrator attacks the old hag textually, and the 'real' Aimée attacks with her own hands.

However, Lacan goes further with his analysis to suggest that there is a sexual element to the friction he notices between the self (Aimée) and her ego ideal. Lacan argues that this tension is symptomatic of a repressed homosexuality. In order to substantiate his analysis, Lacan reads over the events in Aimée's history to locate the moments that may support his hypothesis. Largely dismissing other details in Aimée's case history – that she was married, that she sent love letters to the Prince of

¹⁶² Lacan, "The Case of Aimée," p. 225.

Wales, that her first love was the town's 'Don Juan'¹⁶³ – all these signifiers of heterosexuality are subjugated to the relationship she has with her mother and later with her sister who comes to live with her and her husband. He suggests that Aimée's relationship with her mother and sister exemplified a latent or repressed homosexuality.

However, in substantiating his theories on repressed homosexuality, Lacan's reading appears to overlook or dismiss other details of Aimée's life which exemplify early experiences with paranoia. After losing her first child, Aimée blames her best friend, believing her to be responsible: "Her child was born dead. It was a girl, asphyxiated by having the cord around its neck. She was devastated. She blamed it all on her enemies, and in particular on a woman who for three years had been her best friend."¹⁶⁴ After giving birth to her second child, Aimée becomes preoccupied and perhaps paranoid that someone will kill her son. When she is arrested she explains that she believes that Huguette Duflos and a famous writer ("P.B.") are conspiring to kill her son.¹⁶⁵ For Lacan, all these reasons are 'flimsy.'¹⁶⁶

The point here is not to assert an alternative motive or diagnosis, nor to solve the crime on my own terms; rather it is to highlight the way Lacan reads the case for what he is looking for; the way he places the events of Aimée's life into hierarchical order according to his own theoretical assumptions. Instead of arriving at an answer, Lacan goes back in search of the answer he is looking for: sexual desire. In doing so,

¹⁶³ Lacan, "The Case of Aimée," pp. 214, 217, 222.

¹⁶⁴ Lacan, "The Case of Aimée," p. 216.

¹⁶⁵ Lacan, "The Case of Aimée," pp. 216-217. The irony here, as Elisabeth Roudinesco notes in *Jacques Lacan & Co.*, is that Aimée's son, Anzieu, becomes a psychoanalyst, analysed and trained under Lacan (although Lacan claims not to have made the connection at the time of requesting Anzieu). It is also worth noting that Aimée worked as Alfred Lacan's (Jacques Lacan's father) cook for ten years, pp.120-121.

¹⁶⁶ Lacan, "The Case of Aimée," p. 216.

he does not discover the ‘truth,’ rather, I would argue, he assembles the ‘truth.’ Perhaps Lacan is not willing to tolerate allowing the “secrets of the theatre,” the night that Aimée confronts Huguette at the theatre door, to remain a secret. Like Aimée’s narrator he asks questions, wants to know what it all means, and yet also like her narrator, he is ultimately barred from ever knowing the ‘real’ reason Aimée has for attacking Huguette Duflos that night.

READING THE MURDER SCENE

Lacan’s work on Aimée appears again in an essay he writes for the *Minotaure* on the Papin sisters entitled, “Motives of Paranoid Crime: The Crime of the Papin Sisters.” It is interesting to note that this edition of the *Minotaure* is full of pictures of women in compromising positions: photographs from Man Ray of women in cages, sketches of women being raped during war, and women looking with innocent eyes towards the viewer. Perhaps the most unsettling is Salvador Dali’s “Le Phénomène de l’extase,” a photographic collection of women in different stages of sexual ecstasy.¹⁶⁷ Each snapshot features a woman caught in a moment of what appears to be pure bliss. Within the collage of women in orgasmic poses is a picture of Bernini’s statue of St. Teresa; a statue that Lacan will later write about in *Encore*. The image anticipates Lacan’s theorisation of female desire, as discussed in the first chapter, as well as his interest in answering Freud’s infamous question, “what does woman want?”

Lacan’s interest in the Papin sisters varies from his work on “Marcelle C.” or Aimée primarily because the Papin sisters were never patients of Lacan’s. Although

¹⁶⁷ Salvador Dali, “Le Phénomène de l’extase,” *Minotaure*, 3 / 4 (1933), pp. 76-77.

Lacan's handling of the case may imply that he had contact with the two sisters, he did not. In this example, he is in the position of observer, not analyst. This distinction is important because Lacan's reading of the case is dependent on other people's observations, not his own. And yet, the way Lacan treats the case does not take into account the distance that existed between him and the Papin sisters.

Lacan's article on the Papin case begins with a dramatisation of their crime; a beginning that shares similarities with his presentation of Aimée's case:

Each [sister] seized an adversary, tore her eyes from their sockets (a deed unheard of, it was said, in the annals of crime), and brained her. Next, with the aid of what could be found within reach, hammer, tin pitcher, kitchen knife, they assailed the bodies of their victims, bashing their faces, baring their genitals, and deeply slashing the thighs and buttocks of one in order to soil with blood the members of the other. Then they washed the instruments of these atrocious rites, cleansed themselves, and retired to the same bed.¹⁶⁸

The two sisters, Christine and Léa brutally murdered the two women they worked for in a bourgeoisie home in Le Mans, France. There appears to be no motive for the crime, apart from a power failure, which the two maids may have believed to be their fault. They gave the court no motive nor expressed hatred towards their victims; in other words, they left the public searching for answers to their mysterious crime. Doctor Benjamin Logre was the only expert used in the Papin's defence. He offers several diagnoses for their crime: "notions of persecution, sexual perversion, epilepsy or hystero-epilepsy" (8). Lacan pays respect to Logre's analysis, both

¹⁶⁸ Jacques Lacan, "Motives of Paranoid Crime: The Crime of the Papin Sisters," trans. Jon Anderson, *Critical Texts 5* (1988), pp. 7-11, (p. 7). Subsequent references will appear in the text.

through his dedication and by suggesting that it is Logre's analysis that allows someone like him to offer an alternative analysis without actually seeing the Papin sisters as patients. In other words, in citing Logre's diagnoses Lacan is reminding his reader that Logre offered the courts a diagnosis without actually analysing his patients, and so Lacan suggests that he can offer an alternative analysis without examining the Papin sisters. Lacan implies that he is as qualified as Logre to interpret the two sisters, if not more so, because of his previous case study on Aimée.

Lacan's analysis of the two sisters focuses primarily on Christine's behaviour after she is separated from her younger sister Léa in jail. He notes the way Christine has hallucinations, tries to tear her eyes out, behaves erotically, and believes that her victims are still alive (7-8). Christine's behaviour, according to Lacan, displays classic symptoms of a paranoid delirium. However, it is not what Christine does as much as what she says that interests Lacan. She declares: "I really think that in another life I must have been my sisters' husband" (9). This comment along with the fact that the two sisters retired to the same bed after the crime interests Lacan most in his analysis.

For example, Lacan poses the rhetorical question: "And what significance cannot be found in the exclusive affection of the two sisters, the mystery of their life, the eccentricities of their cohabitation, and their fearful reconciliation in the same bed after the crime? Our precise experience of these patients yet gives us pause before the assertion, which some people pass over, that sexual relations actually existed between the sisters" (10). His question can, perhaps, be re-formulated to read: what can we, as analysts/critics, not read into the dark silent spaces of female sexuality? What Lacan asks is what significance *cannot* be made of the strange

circumstances that surround the Papin case. He asks his reader how s/he could come to a conclusion of anything else given the signifiers all point towards a sexual relationship.

Lacan's style here and in other places employs a journalistic tone, marking a strong contrast to his later, more psychoanalytical texts such as *Écrits* and *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. It should remind the reader of the context in which Lacan's analysis appears. Readers of a journal such as *Minotaure* would most likely be interested in the sisters' 'secret life' and the crime itself rather than the specifics of analytic terms and conditions. Perhaps Lacan's subtle suggestion of two women in bed together is a way of tantalising his readers.

Lacan believes that the two women suffer from a rare condition called *Délires à deux*; a type of madness that strikes two people at the same time with the same condition: a "paired delirium" (10). Although other experts in the case argue that this diagnosis is impossible, Lacan dismisses their assertions and insists that his diagnosis is well founded (10). He suggests that they both suffer from self-punitive paranoia, a condition similar to the one he diagnoses Aimée with: "The emotional ambivalence toward the older sister commands all the self-punitive behaviour of our 'Aimée case'" (11). Lacan's references to Aimée refers his reader back to his theorisation of self-punitive paranoia, a diagnosis he seems wary to give fully to the Papin sisters. The distinction Lacan makes between the Papin sisters and Aimée is that the two sisters cannot individuate themselves from each other, that is, they do not have identities separate from one another, and therefore cannot hurt themselves. As he argues: "But it seems that between them the sisters could not even cover the distance necessary to bruise themselves. True Siamese twins in spirit (*âmes*

siamoises), they formed a world forever closed; reading their dispositions after the crime, Doctor Logre said, ‘one would think one were seeing double’” (11). For Lacan, the sisters’ spiritual twinning means that they cannot actually hurt themselves, and so they hurt the mirrored image of themselves: the mother and daughter they murder.

In his theorisation, Lacan implies that identity and consequently desire is predicated upon a specular and spatial relationship to an Other. In the case of Aimée, he locates the Other as Aimée’s ego ideal, whom she punishes instead of punishing the ‘real’ object of her desire: herself. Underlying both cases is both Lacan’s insistence on narcissism as well as his sexing of the arrangement as homosexual, or incestual (Lacan conflates the two). Lacan writes with regard to Aimée that “each of the persecutors was really nothing other than a new image, always a mere prisoner of Aimée’s narcissism, of this sister whom our patient had made her ideal. Now we understand what the glass obstacle was that prevented her forever from knowing that she loved all these persecutors, although she cried out that she did: they were only images” (11). The “glass obstacle” to which Lacan refers anticipates his later work in “Le Stade du Mirror” or “The Mirror Stage.”

THE “GLASS OBSTACLE”

In his work on the denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought, Martin Jay suggests that Lacan’s “Mirror Stage” is heavily influenced by Lacan’s early case studies of paranoid women and violence. Jay understands the link between Lacan’s early work on criminal madwomen and his theorisation of the “Mirror

Stage” to be a result of the way Lacan understood specular identification.”¹⁶⁹ Although no conclusive connections can be drawn between Lacan’s early work on Aimée and the Papin sisters and his theorisation of the “Mirror Stage,” bringing them side by side elicits parallels and intersections that are convincing.¹⁷⁰

Lacan stresses that the “Mirror Stage” is a moment of identification: “We have only to understand the mirror stage *as an identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image – whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term *imago*.”¹⁷¹ By this Lacan means that this stage, this recognition and assumption of the mirrored image, precedes a dialectical relationship with an Other, and a realisation of subjectivity in language.¹⁷² In other words, Lacan understands this moment as preceding social inscription, a phase the ego progresses through. The mirror stage establishes the relationship between the subject and his/her sense of reality.¹⁷³ Lacan’s theory outlines the movement from the “specular *I*” to the “social *I*”¹⁷⁴ – an *I* that must be mediated, and in a sense, contained, by an Other (or through the awareness that an Other exists).

Lacan derives his understanding of the effects spatial awareness has on identity largely from Henri Wallon’s work on transitivity. Wallon studies the way in which children develop their emotional responses to other children. He notices that

¹⁶⁹ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, p. 349.

¹⁷⁰ For an interesting article on the problematic ‘origins’ and chronological ordering of Lacan’s “Mirror Stage,” see also, Jane Gallop, “Lacan’s ‘Mirror Stage’: Where to Begin,” *SubStance*, No. 37/38 (1983), pp. 118-128.

¹⁷¹ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, p. 2.

¹⁷² Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, p. 2.

¹⁷³ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, p. 4.

¹⁷⁴ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, p. 5.

children, at a young age, have trouble differentiating themselves from each other. That is, if a child hits another he often cries because he has not individuated himself from the other child. Wallon terms this phenomenon 'transitivism,' and understands it to be a necessary and healthy progression into subjectivity. Lacan, on the other hand, notices the danger of spatial distance and argues that without knowing the self from the other, aggression develops. In her article on the differences between Wallon's work and Lacan's, Shuli Barzilai writes: "Wallon's detailed experiments clearly established a conceptual paradigm for Lacan's understanding of the mirror stage. Yet Lacan decisively parts company with Wallon – and this departure is arguably the core of his theoretical innovation – on two points: the status of the mirror and the identity of the specular image."¹⁷⁵ In a departure from Wallon's findings, Lacan argues that the inability to individuate self from other leads the subject into aggression, not towards healthy subjectivity as Wallon suggests.

To return to the Papin article, the "glass obstacle" to which Lacan refers functions as the first stage in identity development, a step that Lacan believes the Papin sisters do not take. According to Lacan's analysis, Christine imagines Lea's image to be her own, and vice versa. The two are unable to individuate from each other and thus they are led to aggressively attack the two women who serve as their Other. Seeing the mother and daughter as the mirrored image of themselves, Lacan argues that the Papin sisters acted out against them instead of their true object: themselves.

Judith Butler considers the subject and its relationship to desire from a variety

¹⁷⁵ Shuli Barzilai, "Models of Reflexive Recognition: Wallon's *Origines du Caractère* and Lacan's 'Mirror Stage,'" in *The Psychoanalytical Study of the Child*, Vol. 50 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 368-382. (p. 372).

of theoretical perspectives in *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth Century France*. When she arrives at Lacan she writes: "Desire is, then, the expression of a longing for the return to the origin that, if recoverable, would necessitate the dissolution of the subject itself. Hence, desire is destined for an imaginary life in which it remains haunted and governed by a libidinal memory it cannot possibly recollect."¹⁷⁶ Read in this way the murder signals the breakdown of Lea and Christina Papin's subjectivity as a result of fulfilling their desire; one that is lesbian, incestual, transgressive, and murderous. This is the way Lacan reads the event: as a result of the aggression manifested from a jealous battle for identification and as a realisation of sexual desires.

The paradox however is that if the two sisters are unable to individuate and thus, under his "Mirror Theory," unable to assert their own identity and desires then how are they able to choose one another as a love object? Lacan's veiled assertion that there were sexual relations between the sisters, based on the evidence that they spent all their time together and retired to their bed after the murder, suggests what he terms homosexual desire. However, if as Lacan argues, they stop at a crucial point in their development – "They did not evolve beyond the first stage (11)" – which renders them unable to distinguish self from other, then how can they desire?

Lacan, as discussed in the first chapter, theorises desire as the desire of the Other. And yet, in the case of the Papins, there is no Other *except* the two women they murder. In this case, what Lacan is also suggesting is that there was a lesbian desire on the part of the Papin sisters for the two women they killed, or to put it in other terms, these two women represented the desire they could not have (and that

¹⁷⁶ Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth Century France* (New York: Columbia, 1987), p. 187.

they imagined to exist), and so they killed them in anger (and perhaps denial). However, this hypothesis is still dependent on the two sisters acknowledging an Other outside themselves, which is not allowable within Lacan's diagnosis.

There is a confusion, perhaps indeed, among the terms and arrangements in Lacan's analysis. To insert a definitive reading would perhaps jeopardise his other work on self-punitive paranoia, and after all, he did not actually meet these two sisters. Lacan delays his veiled assertion of sexual relations between the sisters until the very last moment in the article. In many ways it functions as a tease to the reader as s/he leaves the article with the notion of sexual perversion, of two "twin" sisters together in bed. In doing so, he manages to distance his reader from the brutality and horror of the murder. Instead of the graphic descriptions of the crime that the article opens with, no doubt for dramatic effect, Lacan ends the article with a description of a fantastical square dance: "That fateful evening, under anxiety of an imminent punishment, the sisters mingled the mirage of their illness with the image of their mistresses. They detested the distress of the couple whom they carried away in an atrocious quadrille" (11). The alliteration of the first sentence mesmerises its reader. Lacan employs words and phrases that could be used to describe a romantic evening such as; "mingled," "mirage," "couple," and "quadrille," to temper those that actually capture the brutality of the event, words such as "punishment," "illness," and "atrocious." Even "punishment" and "illness" refer more to the victim status the Papin sisters acquire in Lacan's article and in surrealist circles than to the victims of the murder.

The concluding lines in Lacan's article reveal more of his own desire than the presumed desire he assigns to the Papins. He writes: "The sacrilegious curiosity

which from the beginning of time has anguished man moved them in their desire for the victims and in their attempt to track down in the dead women's gaping wounds what Christine in her innocence later described to the court as "the mystery of life" (11). Lacan pays particular attention to the "gaping wounds" of the Papin's victims, attaching a sexual and metaphysical meaning to the women's genitals. In drawing out Christine's expression, Lacan links her quest for knowledge (of the mystery of life) to his own quest for the secret knowledge of the criminal, madwoman. Although Lacan characterises Christine's comment as 'innocent,' in his retelling of the events her words become part of an answer to why they committed the crime and why they sought to find the answer to their own desires in the two women they killed.

THE "INFATUATED OBSERVER"¹⁷⁷

At the end of his essay on the 'Mirror Stage,' Lacan concludes that: "The sufferings of neurosis and psychosis are for us a schooling in the passions of the soul, just as the beam of the psychoanalytic scales, when we calculate the tilt of its threat to entire communities, provides us with an indication of the deadening of the passions in society."¹⁷⁸ Tying Lacan's initial admission of his "reflections" on paranoiac knowledge with his concluding ode to the knowledge society has yet to gain from the sufferings of the neurotic and psychotic, knowledge that, if understood correctly, serves to help liven the passions of society, offers a neatly bound relation between subjectivity, psychosis, and women, one that although not explicitly offered by Lacan, is, I would suggest, there implicitly.

¹⁷⁷ Clément, *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, p.80.

¹⁷⁸ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, p. 7.

As Catherine Clément writes: “[Lacan] took the view that [the Papin sisters]’ criminal madness was not so much a disturbance as a ‘social masterpiece’ (chef-d’oeuvre social). Their inspiration inspired Lacan; hidden no longer, shamanism proclaimed itself, even to Lacan himself.”¹⁷⁹ This is a point that Clément develops exceptionally well. Clément presents her reader with a Lacan that is not offered in most critiques. It is Lacan as shaman, mystic, poet¹⁸⁰ and in part, as madman – if only, to be the one who can understand these ‘madwomen.’ As she argues: “Only a person willing to hear what these women are saying, a person willing to become crazy in order to understand them, can gain access to this meaning and yet remain within the confines of the human community from which the patient has been cast out. The message is clear: Lacan proclaims it to himself.”¹⁸¹

Clément’s representation of Lacan, although expertly constructed, is perhaps a bit too nostalgic and clearly romanticised. Writing in the wake of the backlash that cast Lacan from his status as high priest, Clément appears to be saving Lacan by emphasising his ‘sensitive side.’ She is not following in the line of others who have become strict and dogmatic disciples, that is clear, but her incantations and memories carry with them a tone of loving dutifulness.¹⁸² She begins her critique by referring to her daughter, and it is hard not to read Clément as a sort of daughter to Lacan, remembering him ‘honestly’ and with the kind of compassion reserved for parents.

¹⁷⁹ Clément, *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, p. 56.

¹⁸⁰ In 1933, Lacan published a sonnet entitled, “Hiatus irrationalis,” in *Le Phare de Neuilly*, 3/4; reprinted in the *Magazine littéraire*, 121, February (1977), p. 11, as cited in Macey, *Lacan in Context*. Macey writes: “This is apparently Lacan’s only venture into poetry; stylistically, the sonnet is somewhat reminiscent of the work of Pierre Jean Jouve,” pp. 212-213.

¹⁸¹ Clément, *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, p. 58.

¹⁸² Roudinesco in *Jacques Lacan & Co.* reminds her readers that Catherine Clément organised a special edition of the feminist journal *L’Arc* on Jacques Lacan. “At the request of Catherine Clément, who had long been interested in female paranoia, Lacan had agreed to republish the part of his thesis concerning the attack against the actress Huguette Duflos and the anamnesis of the case,” p. 525.

Her critique is even reassuring for some feminists who, having read only negative things about Lacan, can now see a new side to him that has otherwise been neglected. In any case, Clément provides her readers with an interesting story of Lacan and 'his' madwomen within the chapter appropriately titled, 'The Ladies' Way.'

Lacan may have mimicked the language of madwomen, as Clément contends; however, he does not go so far as to 'give up his knowledge.' He remains the analyst above all, the 'subject who knows.' In "Aggressivity and Psychoanalysis," a seminar closely linked to the 'Mirror Theory,' Lacan develops the need for the analyst to relate, as much as possible, to the patient's state of mind by imagining that a request for help emerges from the patient: "'Take upon yourself,' the patient is telling us, 'the evil that weighs me down; but if you remain smug, self-satisfied, unruffled as you are now, you won't be worthy of bearing it.'"¹⁸³ This admission can explain and support Clément's representation of Lacan as madman to 'his' madwomen. And yet, as Lacan goes on to say, this call for help only masks the patient's 'truth' which he imagines as "I can't bear the thought of being freed by anyone other than myself."¹⁸⁴

Writing about *La Mystérique* Luce Irigaray contends that: "It is in order to speak woman, write to women, act as preacher, and confessor to women, that man usually has gone to such excesses [. . .] That he has given up his knowledge in order to attend to woman's madness. Falling – as Plato would say, no doubt, – into the trap of mimicking them, of claiming to find jouissance as 'she' does."¹⁸⁵ Lacan takes on this position of 'mad man' in order to answer a call for help that he imagines comes from his 'mad' women, and yet he is careful not to fall too deeply into a "trap of

¹⁸³ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, p. 13.

¹⁸⁴ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, p. 13.

¹⁸⁵ Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, pp. 191-2.

mimicking them” or to jeopardise his authority on the secret knowledge or *jouissance* of woman.

Although Lacan does not fall into a trap of “mimicking” these madwomen, he does fall into the tricky position of wanting to get close to a ‘secret knowledge’ they possess while maintaining a critical distance and authority. As Clément cleverly describes his actions: “Lacan does not really make the connection between the poetic and the pathological. He dances about, he behaves seductively. From infatuated observer to therapist, he is first too far away, then too close. He stands aloof or swoops down close, dives and climbs, stumbles but regains his footing.”¹⁸⁶ The issue that Clément raises here and elsewhere in her critique is the notion of distance – and it is an essential one according to Lacan in the process of identification.

For Lacan, it is because there is not enough distance, or not an appropriate amount of distance, between the Papin sisters that causes their flight into murder. Unlike Henri Wallon, Lacan believes the inability to differentiate self from other leads to aggression, and in the Papin sisters’ case, to murder. Their over-identification and inability to distinguish one from the other causes what Lacan believes to be a “psychic inversion.”¹⁸⁷ This condition is based on Freud’s thesis that paranoia is a defence against homosexuality.¹⁸⁸ Lacan, in his interpretation of the crime, takes Freud’s theory on ‘inverted psyche’ in order to extend it through the Papin sisters. As discussed, Lacan imagines that the two sisters’ desire for each other became projected onto the double of mother and daughter (Mme. and Mlle.

¹⁸⁶ Clément, *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, p. 80.

¹⁸⁷ Clément, *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, p. 75.

¹⁸⁸ See also Victor Burgin’s *In/Different Spaces: Place and Memory in Visual Culture* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1996), pp. 126-30 for a further elaboration on the connection between Lacan’s analysis of the Papin sisters and Freud’s work with Schreber.

Lancelin). On the one hand, he theorises the dangers of spatial distance and yet, on the other hand, he appears to lose sight of his critical focus, that of *délire à deux*, in an attempt to insert desire into his reading. He “dances about” and “behaves seductively,” as Clément argues; he lures his readers in, encouraging them to take a closer look at the Papin sisters, and then he jumps back to assume his role as analyst.

“CRAZY TALK”

As analyst, Lacan must analyse the language of the Papin sisters in order to ‘make sense’ of their crime and of their madness. Language is an integral element in the scene of analysis. Psychoanalysis relies on the medium of speech for its analysis. Jacques Lacan writes: “whether it sees itself as an instrument of healing, of training, or of exploration in depth, psychoanalysis has only a single medium: the patient’s speech.”¹⁸⁹ The sisters’ silence is another ‘symptom’ according to Lacan of their paranoia or “underdeveloped” sexuality. Their silence is also interpreted as an aggressive, powerful element in the case. Lacan writes in “The Crime of the Papin Sisters” that “this silence could not be empty, even if it was obscure in the eyes of the actors” (7). His reference to the Papin sisters as “actors” recalls Lacan’s use of the word “drama” in his description of the anticipatory moment in the “Mirror Stage.” Lacan writes: “The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic.”¹⁹⁰ The “drama” that Lacan refers to stages a specular and spatial

¹⁸⁹ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, p. 40.

¹⁹⁰ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, p. 4.

relationship between self and other; it is a drama that must be performed in order for a healthy relationship between self and other.

As discussed, Lacan only hints towards the explicit nature of the Papin sisters' sexuality; he leaves it as a possibility, a move that renders his article more ambiguous and intriguing. As he writes: "One must have lent an attentive ear to the strange declarations of such patients to know the follies that their shackled conscience can build upon the enigma of the phallus and of female castration (11)." He suggests that they hold secrets and answers to the enigma of crucial theories on female desire. That is, the Papin sisters as a case for inquiry, as objects to be 'unshackled' by the right psychoanalyst (namely Lacan), could offer critical answers to the riddles of woman's desire.

The sisters' language and silence is an important site for debate. Perhaps one of their most subversive acts was to refuse to offer an explanation for their crimes, to stay quiet and unavailable to those, such as Lacan, who wanted to get inside their minds to find answers to his own questions, questions outside the brutality of the murder itself. In her account of the courtroom events, Elisabeth Roudinesco writes: "[The Papin sisters] used words unknown to their public, half in dialect, half in some primordial language, thus expressing the secret significance of an act whose meaning they themselves were ignorant of."¹⁹¹ Roudinesco draws attention to the "secret significance" of the Papin sisters' language, as if the two sisters were trying to guard hidden knowledge from outsiders. The "primordial language" that Roudinesco uses to describe the breakdown of the Papin sisters' language also seems to support

¹⁹¹ Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co.*, p.126.

Lacan's suggestion that their over-identification with each other causes a breakdown in subjectivity and language.

However, what is often overlooked in the dynamics between analyst and analysand is the position of the listener. The speaker is often held accountable for the listener's interpretations, and in this case, often misinterpretations. In *Crazy Talk: a study of the discourse of schizophrenic speakers*, psychiatrists Sherry Rochester and J.R. Martin question the definition of schizophrenia, defined as 'the failure of discourse.' They argue that historically the direction of analysis has moved from analyst to patient, placing the responsibility on the speaker for the listener's comprehension: "To say that a speaker is incoherent is only to say that one cannot understand that speaker. So to make a statement about incoherent discourse is really to make a statement about one's own confusion as a listener. It is therefore just as appropriate to study what it is about the listener which makes him or her 'confusable' as it is to study what it is about the speaker which makes him or her 'confusing.'"¹⁹² They question: "to what extent is the speaker's utterance responsible for the listener's confusion?"¹⁹³ This is a very important distinction to make. Are the Papin sisters responsible for giving their observers an answer to their madness, for providing an understanding of their crime, or for speaking a language that can be understood by their listeners?

In the case of Aimée, Lacan looks directly at her language in order to read whether it communicates madness. The positions of speaker and listener can be compared to that of writer and reader and of analyst and patient. One communicates

¹⁹² Sherry Rochester and J.R. Martin, *Crazy Talk: A Study of the Discourse of Schizophrenic Speakers* (New York: Plenum Press, 1979), p. 3.

¹⁹³ Rochester and Martin, *Crazy Talk*, p. 3.

through language, the other interprets. Lacan understands the failure of their discourse to be rooted in their madness, not in his ability or inability to understand what they communicate.

According to Clément, Lacan does try to fall into the excesses that would allow him access to that knowledge; however, it is almost as if he gives up frustrated and falls back to the analyst's chair, resigned to sexual repression as a motive for murder. He dives and swoops as Clément tells us; however, he never reaches the knowledge he is looking for, although subsequent accounts of the crime rely on him as the communicator of truth on their behalf. They see Lacan as deciphering the noncommunicable signifiers, as decoding the mystery, and they gladly accept his truth and move on with their own. This is one of the problems that underlines psychoanalytical critiques on desire. Something is taken for granted, taken as truth and then repeated in another context.

This is not to say that an 'original' truth exists, waiting to be found. Rather, the assumption of truth is an unstable premise to build theoretical foundations on. In a similar way, it becomes very difficult to suggest alternative constructions to those offered in psychoanalytical critiques because so much recovery is necessary. Not only does the critic need to revisit the 'crime' scene, as it were, but s/he has to follow along the same path of the psychoanalyst, seeing yet avoiding the traps of his/her guide.

Lacan's article in the *Minotaure* locates him as an observer in the scene of a *crime passionnel*, like the opening scene of Marguerite Duras's *Moderato Cantabile*, which begins with two lovers in a square, one having just shot the other.¹⁹⁴ However,

¹⁹⁴ Marguerite Duras, *Moderato Cantabile* trans. Richard Seaver (London: Calder Publications, 1997; originally published, 1958).

unlike Duras' Anne Desbaresdes, who witnesses the two lovers on the ground, Lacan was not at the scene of the crime, nor did he involve himself in the case directly as an analyst. Instead, he reconstructs the scene of the crime in his imagination, he sees the events that have no doubt been offered prior in newspapers or criminal reports. In doing so, he engages himself with the sublime aspects of the crime, reading the events like he does in his thesis on Aimée.

In her influential essay, "Turning the Screw of Interpretation," Shoshana Felman suggests that in the psychoanalytic model, knowledge resides in the Other and is there to be grasped, seized by the subject. "Knowledge haunts,"¹⁹⁵ she tells us. The knowledge that Lacan imagines the Papin sisters possess and keep from his grasp haunts not only him, but those who later critique his theories. Lacan seems to imagine that he has found the meaning of the Papin sisters' crime, that he has seized their knowledge; however, as Felman goes on to argue, this position places the subject who believes s/he is in the know, as analysand.

In her exhaustive history of Lacan's life and work in *Jacques Lacan & Co.*, Elisabeth Roudinesco risks a hypothesis regarding Lacan as analysand to 'his' criminal and madwomen:

The analysis [. . .] occurred for Lacan elsewhere – and with a woman. Aimée the criminal, Aimée the paranoid played a fundamental role in Lacan's itinerary. She gave him her words, her story, her writing, her madness, allowing him to become the artisan of a new introduction of Freudian thought in France [. . .] Aimée was for Lacan what Fliess had been for Freud [. . .] There is always a woman behind the emergence of a

¹⁹⁵ Shoshana Felman, "Turning the Screw of Interpretation," p. 157.

master, and it was this one that Lacan underwent something in the order of a spontaneous self-analysis that would prevent his lying down for real on the couch of a man.¹⁹⁶

Although Lacan may have induced a poetic madness, as Clément wants us to believe, he does not capture the ‘truth’ about the Papin sisters, nor that of Aimée’s attempted murder. Whether incapable of language, such as the statue of St. Teresa that will appear later in Lacan’s examination of female desire, or rendered as incapable of language, such as the Papin sisters and Aimée, the non-speaking female subject is the perfect model for Lacan’s explanation of feminine desire, in these cases, lesbian desire. As Luce Irigaray and Diane Elam argue,¹⁹⁷ speaking on behalf of a statue is an easy choice, just as speaking on behalf of paranoid, psychotic women. She either can’t speak back, or if she does, her language is signified as incomprehensible, or what Roudinesco describes as “primordial language.” It is not the fault of the listener (Lacan in this case) but of the speaker, who fails to communicate the logic of her desires. Her ‘failure’ signals a lack, a gap that Lacan rushes to fill.

PART TWO: CRITICAL RETURNS

Lacan is not the only one who arrives on the scene proposing an answer to the ambiguity of the Papin sisters’ crime. Several other accounts, both journalistic and fictional, also detail the Papin’s trial.¹⁹⁸ The second part of this chapter examines other accounts of the Papin sisters’ case followed by recent critiques of Lacan’s article. These revisions and critical returns to Lacan’s ideas in “The Motives of

¹⁹⁶ Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co.*, p. 120.

¹⁹⁷ Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, pp. 90-91; Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction*, p. 54.

¹⁹⁸ Jean Genet’s play *The Maids: A Play*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Grove, 1954) and Wendy Kesselman’s play *My Sister in this House* (New York: French, 1982) are both based on the Papin case.

Paranoid Crime” perform “Freudian readings” in that they foreground the sexual relationship in their analyses.

Shoshana Felman examines the critical analysis of the “Freudian critic” and the intersections between psychoanalysis and reading literature in her essay, “Turning the Screw of Interpretation.” One ‘problem’ with Freudian readings, according to Felman’s argument, is the way they attempt to ‘cure’ or ‘solve’ a textual, or in this case, historical event.¹⁹⁹ What calls out for such a reading, Felman argues, citing Edmund Wilson’s analysis of Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* as an example, is the *ambiguity* of a text: “It is ambiguous, that is, its meaning, far from being clear, is itself a *question*.”²⁰⁰ Sexuality, she maintains, is “the foundation and the guidepost of the critical interpretation [it] takes on the status of an *answer* to the *question* of the text.”²⁰¹

In questioning the ‘truth’ of ‘Freudian readings’ Felman argues that these readings often miss the textuality of the text itself.²⁰² She writes: “The question of a reading’s ‘truth’ must be at least complicated and re-thought through another question, which Freud, indeed, has raised, and taught us to articulate: what does such ‘truth’ (or any ‘truth’) leave out? What is it *made to miss*? What does it have as its function to overlook? What, precisely, is its residue, the *remainder* it does not account for?”²⁰³

In her analysis, Felman critiques the textual scene (Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw*) and, to begin with, I am critiquing a spontaneous scene, a cultural event.

¹⁹⁹ Felman, “Turning the Screw of Interpretation,” pp. 94-207.

²⁰⁰ Felman, “Turning the Screw of Interpretation,” p. 104.

²⁰¹ Felman, “Turning the Screw of Interpretation,” p. 105.

²⁰² Felman, “Turning the Screw of Interpretation,” p. 117.

²⁰³ Felman, “Turning the Screw of Interpretation,” p. 117.

There are, of course, many differences, and therefore problems with eliding textual-based criticism with cultural events. Another crucial difference to draw out is that Felman is calling these readings "Freudian," *not* Lacanian. Felman uses Lacan's revisionary work on Freud as text not as an authoritative doctrine in order to construct an alternative way of reading.²⁰⁴ As she explains: "Our reading of *The Turn of the Screw* would thus attempt not so much to *capture* the mystery's solution, but to follow, rather, the significant path of its flight; not so much to solve or *answer* the enigmatic question of the text, but to investigate its structure [. . .] The question underlying such a reading is thus not '*what* does the story mean?' but rather '*how* does the story mean?'"²⁰⁵

Although I agree with the way of reading Felman proposes here, I disagree that it is Lacan's work that will help us, as theorists, to read for *how* a story means instead of *what* it means. I am also sceptical that it is possible to take 'meaning' out of the psychoanalytic process. Although Lacan has moved psychoanalysis beyond a Freudian search for meaning, his work still remains indebted, and therefore linked, to a Freudian understanding of mental processes, as discussed in Chapter One.²⁰⁶ I continue this strand of the argument in more detail in the final chapter on Deleuze and Guattari. Here I want to focus on critiques of Lacan's article on the Papin sisters in order to demonstrate the way sexual desire is placed at the forefront of their analyses, how authority is given to Lacan although other accounts of the crime exist,

²⁰⁴ Felman, "Turning the Screw of Interpretation," pp. 118-119.

²⁰⁵ Felman, "Turning the Screw of Interpretation," pp. 119.

²⁰⁶ See also Jacques Lacan, *The Psychoses 1955-1956: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book III*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993, pp. 196-205. In his chapter, "On primordial signifiers and the lack of one," Lacan reconceptualises the way 'meaning' has been understood in psychoanalysis.

and how some feminist theorists, in an effort to counter Lacan or to assert a 'feminist' reading of crime, end up falling into the role of "infatuated observer."

Felman argues that the critical scene is repetitive and performative of the textual moment.²⁰⁷ I would like to extend her argument to include the moment of the Papin sisters' crime, which Lacan returns to in his article as do critics of Lacan's article. The critic's doubling back to Lacan's answer of sexual desire between the sisters misses crucial information and overlooks some of the most important aspects of the case itself. In their desire to uncover new ways of reading and arriving at the sexual implications between the sisters or in a desire to usurp Lacan's authority, their readings put the criminal scene into a field of abstraction, where they can critically distance themselves from the actual brutality of the crime. These critics enter into the crime scene constructed by Lacan and in so doing are blind to the other signifiers that Lacan has considered irrelevant to his own theorisation.

Ambiguity shrouds the Papin sisters' case and haunts its onlookers. Why did they kill these women and why in such a horrible and brutal manner? The answer to these questions will remain with the Papin sisters, but will forever more haunt those that seek to recover any meaning to the crime. However, this sort of ambiguity is exactly what draws readers into the critical scene. As someone who is writing about a case such as the Papin sisters, a case that has been written with different approaches, I, as a literary critic, must look to see what has been overlooked. In this way I become the literary critic come detective that Felman critiques in her essay. That is, I am performing the very desire that Felman claims underlines psychoanalytic interpretation: "the desire to be *non-dupe*, to interpret, i.e., at once uncover and

²⁰⁷ Felman, "Turning the Screw of Interpretation," p. 117.

avoid, the very traps of the unconscious.”²⁰⁸ The critic, according to Felman’s argument, becomes desperate not to be on the outside of the ‘truth’ or even of the ‘joke’ – whichever one it may be. S/he wants to discover answers, meanings and to solve the textual, or in this case, the criminal ambiguity. Or, to look at Felman’s argument from another angle, the critic desires to turn the previous critic into a “dupe,” to read for a better, more convincing answer in order to seize control over any final interpretation. In trying to ‘out-dupe’ one another, critics miss the possibilities that lie in not-understanding or in not making-meaning.

The Papin sisters’ case demonstrates the way in which critics seize upon the implied ‘answer’ of desire in Lacan’s article in order to construct new answers and solutions. However, before discussing these critiques, I would like to briefly offer a variation on Lacan’s account of the Papin sisters case, as it highlights the way even the most insignificant (or seemingly insignificant) signifiers can be (and are) read for multiple interpretations.

There are several journalistic accounts of the Papin sisters’ case;²⁰⁹ one such account can be found in a collection of Janet Flanner’s columns entitled, *Paris was Yesterday 1925-1939*. Known under the pen name, “Genêt,” Janet Flanner reported significant events in France from 1925 to 1939 in her column entitled “Letter from Paris” for *The New Yorker*. There are two particularly interesting details that Flanner includes in her account of the Papin sisters’ case that cannot be found in Lacan’s. Firstly, Flanner identifies the policeman who enters the murder scene as “Monsieur

²⁰⁸ Felman, “Turning the Screw of Interpretation,” p. 187.

²⁰⁹ See also Simone de Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, trans. Peter Green (London: Deutsch, 1962); for an extensive and well researched bibliography of French accounts of the Papin trial and case see Christine E. Coffman’s “The Papin Enigma,” footnote 2.

Truth.”²¹⁰ Whether or not this was his name, it lends itself to a number of different interpretations. In their interpretations of the murder scene, critics are trying to discover the truth of what happened both to explain the murder and to answer why the two girls were found in the same bed after the crime. In her account, Flanner writes: “Truth took what was left of the candle – the short circuiting electric iron had blown out the fuse again that afternoon [. . .] and lighted the girls downstairs, over the corpses, and out to the police station. They were still in their blue kimonos and in the February air their hair was wild, though ordinarily they were the tidiest pair of domestics in Le Mans.”²¹¹ In Flanner’s description it is “Truth” that lights the way for the girls as they pass over the reality of their crime. The fact that “Truth” sheds light on the ‘dark’ secrets the girls’ harbour in their bedroom reminds readers of the way this fact, that they were found in bed together, has gained so much significance and attention. As argued, Lacan’s article demonstrates an attempt to figure out the ‘truth’ of what happened, both about the crime and perhaps even more so, about the sisters’ sexuality.

Flanner’s inclusion of “blue kimonos” is another very interesting addition. Perhaps the blue kimonos are not their kimonos, but those of the women they have just murdered. Tired and fed up with their position as relegated others, they kill and lacerate the women they work for in a revolt against the bourgeoisie. Or perhaps they saved up their money for this one decadence. The “blue kimonos” also suggest a certain sexual element, they are silk, often read as an alluring or sexy fabric, as opposed to cotton or terrycloth. In Elizabeth Roudinesco’s *Jacques Lacan and*

²¹⁰ Janet Flanner, *Paris Was Yesterday 1925-1939*, ed. Irving Drutman (London: Angus and Robertson, 1972), p. 99.

²¹¹ Janet Flanner, *Paris Was Yesterday 1925-1939*, p. 99.

Company, she tells her readers that the two women were in “a simple robe” at the time of their arrest. Another account has them in “pink dressing-gowns,”²¹² and in other versions – Lacan’s to name one – it is implied that they are naked in bed together.²¹³ What they were wearing is a small detail, and yet an indeterminate signifier. In a case that has been read, revised, interpreted, and critiqued, every detail has an impact on any final analysis or meaning it is given. As Catherine Clément writes: “The enigma stands before us: we must now decipher it.”²¹⁴ The ‘we’ stands for the psychoanalysts, both then and now. ‘We’ analysts must ‘solve’ the hidden meanings, ‘cure’ the unconscious desires and drives, and decipher the hidden signifiers in order to make sense of this dark and mysterious case. This is the call Lacan answers. It is also the drive behind the critiques of Lacan’s article that have followed.

In recent criticism, Lacan’s subtle suggestion that the two sisters had a lesbian relationship is foregrounded as the most important element in the case. Christine E. Coffman elaborates on this presupposed homosexual dimension in her essay, “The Papin Enigma.” Coffman’s title immediately draws her readers’ attention to the unsolved nature of the crime and the way it haunts a collective imagination. Choosing to focus more on Nancy Meckler’s film, based on the Papin case, *Sister, My Sister*,²¹⁵ Coffman reads the gaps that she argues have been left as a result of cultural taboos against incest and lesbianism.²¹⁶ She also witnesses Lacan’s attempt to

²¹² Nicola Ward Jouve, “An Eye for an Eye: The Case of the Papin Sisters,” ed. Helen Birch, *Moving Targets: Women, Murder and Representation* (London: Virago, 1993), p. 7.

²¹³ See also Jacques Lacan, “Motives of Paranoid Crime,” p. 7.

²¹⁴ Clément, *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, p. 72.

²¹⁵ Nancy Meckler’s film, a BBC production, is based on the Papin sisters’ crime. The screenplay is written by Wendy Kesselman, based on her play, ‘My Sister in this House.’ The movie explicitly suggests an incestual, lesbian relationship existed between the sisters.

²¹⁶ Catherine E. Coffman, “The Papin Enigma,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 5, 3 (1999), pp. 331-359, (p. 332).

locate the Papin sisters' crime within a psychoanalytic framework that figures them as lesbian and therefore underdeveloped. Their lack of a male partner, according to Coffman, symbolises for Lacan their refusal of heterosexuality, a refusal that Lacan reads as aggressive paranoia. However, as Coffman points out, such a conclusion is not surprising: "Lacan's analysis of the Papins' 'paranoia' is not so much a conclusive diagnosis as evidence of psychoanalysis's obsession with the phallus, which drives his solution to the enigma of the two women's murderous motives."²¹⁷

Although I agree with Coffman's analysis to a great extent, as reflected in the first part of this chapter, what Coffman leaves out of her analysis is the indeterminacy of Lacan's suggestion. As she states in the preface to her article, she is reading in the 'gaps,' that is, she is filling in the missing pieces, the grey areas of Lacan's argument. In doing so, Coffman runs the risk of repeating Lacan's reading of the Papin sisters' case. That is, she, like Lacan, fills in the blanks of what is unknown and therefore inconclusive. Although I agree with her critique of Lacan, her method puts her in danger of repeating Lacan's quest for the 'truth.' Although she will not fill the missing spaces with the Phallus, as Lacan does, she is nonetheless trying to 'solve' the ambiguity of the case. The fact that Lacan leaves his readers with a degree of ambiguity is certainly contrived and is no doubt evidence that he has managed to capture some of the madwoman's style he was so keen to emulate. However, it leaves us, as critics, in the a dangerous position of repeating the very thing Lacan is accused of doing: offering an answer to solve the enigma of desire.

Coffman's critique of Lacan's analysis puts her in jeopardy of committing the 'crime' that she accuses Lacan of committing. Barbara Johnson argues that Derrida is

²¹⁷ Coffman, "The Papin Enigma," p. 350.

guilty of falling into a similar theoretical 'trap' in her article, "The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida." Johnson suggests that that Derrida's "one-upmanship" of Lacan in his article "Le Facteur de la Vérité," turns instead into a "one-downmanship" in that he repeats the very 'crimes' he accuses Lacan of committing.²¹⁸ Johnson calls this critical pitfall "the logic of the purloined letter" because Derrida is analysing Lacan analysing Poe's short story *The Purloined Letter*.²¹⁹

Whereas Coffman's article offers a close reading of the crime itself, the case of the Papin sisters appears in other articles as a way of talking about wider concerns such as "paranoiac space,"²²⁰ connections between psychoanalysis, Surrealism and Existentialism,²²¹ and representations of lesbian sexuality or criminality.²²² For example, in Teresa de Lauretis's article entitled, "The Stubborn Drive," she examines conceptions of sexuality in Freud's and Foucault's work in order to consider cultural productions of sexuality and aggression.²²³ In a subsection entitled "Délires à deux," de Lauretis suggests that recent films such as Nancy Meckler's *Sister, My Sister* (1994), a film based on the Papin case, and Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures* (1993), set in New Zealand and based on two girls whose fear of

²¹⁸ Barbara Johnson, "The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida," in *Psychoanalysis and Literature the Question of Reading: Otherwise*, ed. by Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 457-505, (pp. 464-465).

²¹⁹ Johnson, "The Frame of Reference," p. 465.

²²⁰ See also Victor Burgin, "Paranoiac Space," in *Different Spaces*.

²²¹ See also Christopher Lane, "The Delirium of Interpretation."

²²² See also Lynda Hart, *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Lynda Hart, "'They Don't Even Look Like Maids Anymore': Wendy Kesselman's *My Sister in This House*" in *Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre*, ed. by Lynda Hart (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), pp. 131-146; Nicola Ward Jouve, "An Eye for an Eye: The Case of the Papin Sisters," pp. 7-31.

²²³ Teresa de Lauretis, "The Stubborn drive," *Critical Inquiry*, Summer (1998), pp. 851-877, (p. 853).

being separated leads them to kill one of their mothers, are both influenced by Lacan's early theoretical work on the Papin sisters. De Lauretis writes: "The motifs (motives) that Lacan identified as the syndrome of female paranoia – namely, identification between women as repressed homosexuality, 'erotomania' toward a female ego-ideal, and *délire à deux* leading to murder – are all foreground in the last two films."²²⁴ De Lauretis's assertion should make clear the way Lacan's analysis of the Papin sisters, although made from afar, has been accepted or given authority over time. His ideas are those that come back to us, as theorists, this time within a feminist reading of Freud and Foucault as well as of cultural productions of sexuality.

De Lauretis's cites Lacan's article on the Papin sisters and the films that she believes are influenced by his theoretical analysis as an example of how the media uses "lesbian chic" as a marketing tool, and goes on to read *délire à deux* in films such as Paul Verhoeven's *Basic Instinct* (1992).²²⁵ Although there is little doubt that "lesbian chic" is used in marketing campaigns, the examples that de Lauretis chooses necessitate some clarification. De Lauretis suggests that films such as Meckler's *Sister, My Sister* and Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures* perpetuate a connection between the perverse and the pathological, or more specifically, between lesbians and "women who kill."²²⁶ Although de Lauretis's claim, that "lesbian chic" is being popularised in film is well taken, her argument fails to problematise the way these films distort and revise the original case they are based upon.

In other words, de Lauretis fails to remind her readers that Lacan's suggestion of sexual relations between the two sisters is conjecture, not fact, and that Meckler's

²²⁴ De Lauretis, "The Stubborn Drive," p. 869.

²²⁵ De Lauretis, "The Stubborn Drive," pp. 869-870.

²²⁶ De Lauretis, "The Stubborn Drive," p. 870.

version is based on this loose assumption, not on a concrete analysis. In fact, it is more likely that Meckler draws her reading of the Papin case from Wendy Kesselman's play *My Sister in this House*, also based on the case. De Lauretis misses the chance to demonstrate the way in which a subtle suggestion (made by Lacan) is picked up and worked into the "lesbian chic" that she identifies. The re-writing and re-marketing of the case demonstrates the way sexuality and gender have taken precedence over other aspects of the case.

In citing examples of both in-depth analyses of the Papin case such as Coffman's "The Papin Enigma" and more casual references such as in Teresa de Lauretis's "The Stubborn Drive," I am drawing attention to the concern that appears at the forefront of all the recent critiques of the Papin case: the sisters' sexuality. Whether their sexuality is alluded to in order to draw out Lacan's overuse of the phallus as primary signifier, as Coffman argues, or whether their sexuality is used as an example of lesbian representation in film, media or in relation to serial killers, as de Lauretis develops, the Papin sisters' sexuality dominates recent discussion of their case. Broken down this way, it seems highly problematic that so much attention can be drawn to one aspect of an extremely complicated case. It also demonstrates a theoretical interest or impulse to use the figure of the criminal or mad woman as capable of exceeding representation. She is represented in psychoanalytic and feminist accounts as hiding secret knowledge about life and death.

WRITING ON THE BODY

What appears to be missing from the numerous re-readings of the Papin sisters' case is the violence of the crime. In the articles I have just discussed, there is little to no mention of the brutality of the event nor of the victims themselves, they

are relegated to corpses on the floor. In order to pursue this point further, I would like to connect the markings the Papin sisters make on the bodies of their victims with Jenny Holzer's collection entitled *Lustmord*. I would also like to problematise the role of the observer in the spectacle of desire and in the returns made by theorists.

Jenny Holzer works with visual placement and language in her art. Two things are important here: her use of language as a medium of exchange and the use of public space to project something as intimate as desire, arguably taking desire out of the 'bedroom' and into the streets. Like Lacan, she is interested in the overlapping spaces between language and desire. Holzer's 'truisms' (1977-79) demonstrate, both textually and visually, the influence dominant ideology maintains. In an interview with Diane Waldman she says: "I started the work as a parody, like the Great Ideas of the Western World."²²⁷ Holzer's project interrogates the 'truisms' that western society (in particular) take as fact or 'truth.' Placing these truisms in everyday space seems to at once articulate the very truisms western society takes as truth and to throw them out for questioning.

Holzer's *Lustmord* collection, a photographic study of the relationship between writing and violence, was first exhibited in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin* (19 November 1993). Unlike her previous work, the writing is in ink mixed with blood (originally) thus introducing an organic element to the presentation of her words. The pictures in the *Lustmord* collection capture only a segment of skin, a fragment, just enough background for the written words. Holzer's project focuses specifically on violence to women during war; however, the words relate to violence women endure outside war as well. Using a fragment of skin as a canvass, Holzer

²²⁷ Diane Waldham, "The Language of Signs," in *Jenny Holzer* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 1989), p. 18.

writes phrases such as: "THE BLACK SPECKS INSIDE MY EYES FLOAT ON HER BODY I WATCH THEM WHILE I THINK ABOUT HER;" "YOU CONFUSE ME WITH SOMETHING THAT IS IN YOU I WILL NOT PREDICT HOW YOU WANT TO USE ME;" "THE COLOR OF HER WHERE SHE IS INSIDE OUT IS ENOUGH TO MAKE ME KILL HER."²²⁸ These phrases voice the words of the observer, the victim, and the perpetrator in that order. Each phrase relates to the way violence positions woman as "lack" and as a receptacle to the desires projected onto her. The words also refer to the speculative position each (observer, perpetrator, and victim) takes within the act of violence, in particular, sexual violence.

Writing these words on the body reminds the viewer that the site for this lack and violence is the body. Language may distance the reader from making a visual link to the body whereas the photo reminds the viewer explicitly that the body is the site and the location for trauma. Holzer's photographs de-gender the violence although the viewer may code the bodies as female considering they appear under the heading of rape.

In her essay on Holzer's *Lustmord* project titled "Cut-and-Dried Bodies, or How to Avoid the Pervert Trap," Renata Salecl analyses Holzer's work through a Lacanian framework, drawing a distinction between the artist who practices sado-masochistic forms of body art and Holzer's *Lustmord* collection. For Salecl, artists that undertake cutting or mutilating their body parts are operating under a perverse law.

However, Salecl is defining the word 'perverse' within a psychoanalytic framework which understands the pervert to be a person who has not undergone the

²²⁸ Jenny Holzer, eds. David Joselit, Joan Simon and Renata Salecl, *Jenny Holzer* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998), pp. 82-3.

castration complex and is therefore searching to find a sense of law.²²⁹ Salecl argues that: "A crucial difference between masochistic body art practice and the *Lustmord* project is that the body artists seem to be constantly attempting to re-establish the big Other through the laws that their practice itself invents, while Holzer's work assumes that the big Other does not exist, without attempting to cover up this realisation of emptiness. This acknowledgement, in contrast to the actions of body art, endows Holzer's work with a far more heroic dimension."²³⁰ Framed within a psychoanalytic order, artists that practice sado-masochistic rituals such as body piercing or genital mutilation are, for Salecl, substituting an alternative order for a patriarchal or phallogocentric order. In other words, the sado-masochist artist uses his/her body as a way of challenging the authority of the big Other whereas Holzer's work accepts the big Other's non-existence without trying to hide its absence.

The distinction that Salecl draws between sado-masochistic art and Holzer's *Lustmord* project can be applied to how the Papin case has been and continues to be understood and theorised. Understanding the sisters to be emotional twins, Lacan argues that they lash out against their ego-ideal, Mme. and Mlle. Lancelin, instead of hurting the true object of their desires: themselves. To use Salecl's words, the Papin sisters wanted to hurt themselves in order to "re-establish the big Other." However, the fact that the sisters did not flee the scene of the crime may be interpreted as a recognition that the big Other "does not exist." This interpretation would support a "heroic dimension" to their crime. In fact, at the time, Surrealists such as Paul Éluard

²²⁹ Renata Salecl, "Cut-and-Dried Bodies, or How to Avoid the Pervert Trap," in *Jenny Holzer*, ed. by David Joselit, Joan Simon and Renata Salecl (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1988), pp. 78-87, (p. 86).

²³⁰ Salecl, "Cut-and-Dried Bodies, or How to Avoid the Pervert Trap," p. 87.

and Benjamin Péret believed the Papin case demonstrated a liberatory rebellion against the bourgeoisie.²³¹

Whether heroines or criminals, the point in sustaining these readings is to demonstrate the way the Papin case has been and continues to be used to construct a particular reading, whether tragic or heroic. The search for the 'truth' about the sisters' desire will not yield a secret or hidden knowledge about 'woman' as Lacan may have presumed. Nor can we read the sisters as representatives of something beyond their circumstances without running the risk of incorporating assumptions that have been made along the way. The Papin case reflects the desire to 'make sense' of 'woman' and of 'desire' as well as the impossibility of doing so.

²³¹ Christopher Lane, "The Delirium of Interpretation," pp. 43-45.

4. DURAS AND DESIRE

I began with an examination of the way 'lack' is understood in psychoanalytic and feminist interpretations in an effort to move beyond reductive arguments. In chapters two and three, I raised the impossibility of any *one* reading of desire and demonstrated a psychoanalytic conflation between 'woman,' 'truth,' and 'desire.' This chapter will continue these arguments through Marguerite Duras's work. Duras's writing takes desire as a central theme, whether between two lovers, two strangers or a mother and her child. Her work reflects the uncertainty and indeterminacy in desire and in doing so poses alternative ways to theorise desire.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section examines the 'lack' that Duras assigns to her female characters, particularly in *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*. I will argue that although Duras describes her female characters with a 'lack' that can be likened to Lacan's theorisation of 'lack,' she does not do so in order to constitute it as a masculine desire, a narrative decision that can be read as feminist. Instead, Duras maintains a 'lack' in her female characters and at the centre of the text which poses an alternative to psychoanalytic and feminist interpretations. Duras demonstrates the desirability of the lacking female subject so much so that readers and critics alike find themselves lost in a struggle to seek out the 'truth' of characters such as Lol V. Stein.

The second part of this chapter addresses Duras's *Moderato Cantabile* in order to consider the way Duras draws on psychoanalytic influences in order to tell stories and yet does so in a way that resists any final interpretations. In creating

ambiguous terms, ones that resist meaning and formulation, Duras suggests that language is incapable of speaking the 'beyond' of desire; to insist on a singular meaning of desire denies its elusive nature. Duras's narratives suggests that although language is not capable of expressing this 'beyond' of desire, it is nonetheless present within discourse. Her writing reflects the influences of psychoanalysis and yet she does not 'cure' the text of its ambiguities and 'symptoms.' I argue that this textual ambiguity allows desire to remain productively undefined.

Marguerite Duras's work is influenced by psychoanalytic and feminist ideology and yet is faithful to neither. Her divided loyalty to psychoanalysis and feminism is reflected in the strong divide in criticism on Duras's work. Feminist and psychoanalytic critics try to read Duras through their models and yet, as they sometimes conclude, her work will not fit neatly into either framework. Many of the critical interpretations of Duras's fiction rely on psychoanalytic theory, particularly Lacanian theory, to make the implicit suggestions in Duras's work explicit. Psychoanalytic perspectives are largely dominated by a Lacanian approach, most likely due to Lacan's "Hommage" to Duras in which he claims that "Duras proves to know without me what I teach."²³² Titles such as: "Feminine Masquerade in *L'Amant*: Duras with Lacan," "The Dance of the Signifier: Jacques Lacan and Marguerite Duras's *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*," and "Metaphor Between Lacan and Duras: Narrative Knots and the Plot of Seeing," exemplify the way critics have

²³² Jacques Lacan, "Hommage Fait a Marguerite Duras, Du Ravissement de Lol V. Stein," *Ca(s)hiers de la Compagnie Madeleine*, Paris: Renard-Jean Louis, Vol. 52 (1965), pp. 7-15, (p.9). "C'est précisément ce que je reconnais dans le ravissement de Lol V. Stein, où Marguerite Duras s'avère savoir sans moi ce que j'enseigne." The translation is my own.

read Duras with Lacan, as if the two are involved in a partnership.²³³

However, criticism of Duras is not limited to psychoanalytic readings. Feminist critics often use Duras's work to suggest that she constructs an alternative reading of female madness or hysteria,²³⁴ while others see her narrative ambiguity as representative of the male narrator's inability to grasp a female narrative.²³⁵ Other feminist critics have struggled with whether Duras offers a positive view of feminism and argue that her texts punish women who fall outside of traditional feminine roles.²³⁶ Whether the readings are psychoanalytic or feminist, each model seeks to reveal the elusive and ambiguous suggestions in Duras's text. In other words, they perform an analytic session: they pull out the gaps and silences in an effort to make them signify something.

Although a feminist or a psychoanalytic approach produces interpretations that are worthy of consideration, I would like to suggest that both interpretations are problematic when it comes to Duras's work. Each approach maps out how Duras's represents 'woman' and desire and in so doing limits the possibilities in her work. The feminist and psychoanalytic impulse to solve and 'cure' the text of its ambiguities and enigmas misses the play in Duras's texts. In order to pursue these

²³³ John O'Brien, "Metaphor Between Lacan and Duras: Narrative Knots and the Plot of Seeing," *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Vol.29, Pt.3 (1993), pp. 232-245; Janet Thormann, "Feminine Masquerade in *L'Amant*: Duras with Lacan," *Literature and Psychology*, Vol. 40, Pt. 4 (1994), pp. 28-39; Kimberly Philpot Van Noort, "The Dance of the Signifier: Jacques Lacan and Marguerite Duras," *Symposium*, Vol.51, No. 3 (1997), pp. 186-201.

²³⁴ Joline Jeanine Blais, in her unpublished thesis entitled, "Plotting Against Oedipus: Narrative Alternative to Hysteria in the Novels of Jean Rhys and Marguerite Duras," argues that textual readings of Duras's and Rhys's female characters as mad or hysterical is actually a misreading of their (Rhys's and Duras's) attempts to construct a non-Oedipal plot. Blais pays particular attention to the links between suffering and motherhood in her critique (University of Pennsylvania, 1991), abstract.

²³⁵ For example, see also: Laurie Edson, "Knowing Lol: Duras, Epistemology, Gendered Mediation," *Substance*, Vol. 21, Pt.2 (1992), pp. 17-31.

²³⁶ For example, see also: Susan D. Cohen, *Women and Discourse in the Fiction of Marguerite Duras: Love, Legends, Language* (London: Macmillan), 1993.

ideas, I will first examine the way 'lack' functions in Duras's work.

DURASSIAN LACK

'Lack' or absence pervades Duras's fiction and resides predominately within her female characters. Although the plot structures and the characterisations support and foster this 'lack,' the origin or cause for it remains an enigma. The characters in Duras's fiction search for meanings or answers to define or to explain this 'lack' and yet in almost every case, the novel ends without any narrative 'cure' or solution. These unsettling endings disturb both reader and critic, as will be discussed later, and leave 'lack' in place which problematises psychoanalytic and feminist readings.

'Lack,' by definition, is a very difficult thing to explain or describe. Trying to articulate an abstract 'something' that is desired is close to impossible. Duras seems to allude to this linguistic impossibility when she writes in *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*: "It would have been an absence-word, a hole-word, whose centre would have been hollowed out into a hole, the kind of hole in which all other words would have been buried. It would have been impossible to utter it, but it would have been made to reverberate."²³⁷ The struggle to discover and name this "absence-word" dominates the narrative. 'Lack' reverberates throughout Duras's novels and yet it is almost impossible to utter it or to explain just how Duras intends 'lack' to function.

As a way of entering Duras's fiction and of providing a clear example of the way 'lack' is situated in Duras's female characters, I want to refer briefly to *The Malady of Death*, one of Duras's later novels. *The Malady of Death* is short and

²³⁷ Marguerite Duras, *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*, trans. Richard Seaver (New York: Pantheon Books and Grove Press, 1966; originally published, 1964), p. 38. Subsequent references will appear in the text after "Lol."

elliptical; two characters, a man and a woman, meet and spend the rest of the narrative in a hotel bedroom. He pays her to stay with him, although she is not a prostitute.²³⁸ The entire text is narrated with the pronouns “she” and “you,” implicating the reader in the desirous gaze of the male character.

The following two passages demonstrate the way Duras constructs a ‘lack’ in her female character: “You wouldn’t have known her, you’d have seen her everywhere at once, in a hotel, in a street, in a train, in a bar, in a book, in a film, in yourself, your inmost self, when your sex grew erect in the night, seeking somewhere to put itself, somewhere to shed its load of tears;” “She’s more mysterious than any other external thing you’ve ever known. Nor will you, or anyone else, ever know how she sees, how she thinks, either of the world or of you, of your body or your mind, or of the malady she says you suffer from. She doesn’t know, herself. She couldn’t tell you. You couldn’t find out anything about it from her.”²³⁹

The first thing to note is the way “she” is described as someone who is both ordinary, “you’d have seen her everywhere at once,” and yet “more mysterious than any other external thing you’ve ever known.” Duras implies that “her” elusiveness is due, in part, to her everyday appearance. Unsurprisingly the central female figures in Duras’s fiction are often housewives, mothers, or schoolgirls; people that would be considered ordinary and yet, as the texts reveal, they are enigmas to other characters as well as to their readers and critics. Duras’s choice of an ‘ordinary’ woman can be interpreted as a way of undermining assumed and enculturated images of desirable women or as offering her male voyeur a clichéd fantasy: a nameless, faceless woman

²³⁸ Marguerite Duras, *The Malady of Death*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Grove Press, 1986, originally published, 1982), p. 18.

²³⁹ Duras, *The Malady of Death*, pp. 1, 14.

who is solely interested in his own desires.

In addressing two distinctly different ways of reading the representation Duras offers, I am suggesting not only that Duras's work is open to multiple interpretations, an argument I will develop later, but also that in figuring 'lack' it is important not to overlook the moments in which Duras's representations of women do correspond with a psychoanalytic or even anti-feminist interpretation. Although I prefer to read Duras as a feminist writer, in order to do so it is necessary to examine carefully the way her work responds to psychoanalytic processes.

In the example offered, Duras clearly positions "her" as a receptacle for masculine desires; the veiled reference to sexual intercourse ("somewhere to shed its load of tears") situates "her" as a receptacle for her desirer's pleasure. The implicit suggestion in these passages is that "she" is nothing more than an object for an Other's desires; to use Elizabeth Grosz's words, cited in the first chapter, "she" falls within the logic of "lack and acquisition, a logic that has rendered women the repositories, the passive receptacles of men's needs, anxieties, and desires."²⁴⁰

Using an example such as the one cited, it is possible to draw a comparison between the way Duras represents the woman in *The Malady of Death* and Lacan's theorisation of 'lack' and woman. As discussed in Chapter One, Lacan claims that "woman does not exist,"²⁴¹ thus equating woman with pre-discursive 'lack.' He also theorises a feminine *jouissance* that women possess and yet have no knowledge of or access to. Lacan refers to Bernini's statue of St. Teresa for confirmation of his theory and to suggest that woman knows nothing, at least nothing that she can fully understand about pleasuring herself. This 'lack' in woman, under the signifying force

²⁴⁰ Grosz, "Refiguring Lesbian Desire," pp. 69-70.

²⁴¹ Jacques Lacan, *Encore*, p. 7.

of the phallus, structures desire in Lacanian terms.

Duras creates a 'lack' in her female character that can be likened to Lacan's interpretation both of 'woman' and desire. To a certain extent, the woman in Duras's text does not exist. That is, "she" can be anyone and, to some degree, Duras implies that she is any woman. "She" has no distinct identity of her own that is represented through Duras's language. The "you" who pays for her to stay mediates her presence in the text. "She" knows that he suffers from a "malady of death" and yet she "knows without knowing how."²⁴² The secret knowledge that she possesses, and yet has no access to, carries similarities to Lacan's refusal to allow women as well men access to the hidden knowledge of the phallus. As discussed previously, although both men and women are denied access, Lacan implies that woman harbours a secret knowledge, she "knows without knowing how."

Although Duras's female characters share similarities with Lacan's theorisation of lack and 'woman,' the 'lack' in Duras's fiction is not filled or constituted by male desire. Despite his attempts to reach the secret or veiled knowledge in this woman, the "you" in the text can never possess her. "She" leaves without a trace at the end of *The Malady of Death*. The sense of absence, "the malady of death" that begins the text is still in place at the end of the narrative. Duras does not try to 'cure' the 'lack' in either character. Instead of trying to elevate woman to a position equal to man or even higher, or to 'cure' 'lack,' Duras's texts demonstrate how desire creates connections and builds foundations. In other words, Duras's texts allow us, as readers, to think about the productive possibilities in the movement of desire. Duras gestures towards a way of thinking about desire outside

²⁴² Duras, *The Malady of Death*, p. 19.

of 'lack' and acquisition when she writes: "When you wept it was just over yourself and not because of the marvelous impossibility of reaching her through the difference that separates you."²⁴³ Instead of mourning the impossibility of grasping an imagined 'secret' knowledge, Duras suggests "you" marvel in the difference between man and woman. In this way, Duras's text reflect the way we, as readers, look for meaning, or look to 'make sense' of the woman and the circumstances in the text and in so doing overlook other possible readings. Like the "you" in the text, we have no access to the secret knowledge "she" possesses; that is, we are offered no explanation for the "malady of death."

In order to consider this argument further, I turn to *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*; one of Duras's most theorised texts. In his brilliant study of Duras's work, Leslie Hill claims that "of all Duras's novels the one that is best known and has given rise to the most extensive commentary is without doubt her text of 1964, *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*."²⁴⁴ The central drama in the novel revolves around a dance, the South Tahla Beach ball. Like many of Duras's novels, a pivotal moment in the narrative, what I am calling a "scene of desire," is repeated throughout the text as a way of developing both the plot and the characters. The "scene of desire" in *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein* occurs the night of the Town ball when Lol loses her fiancé, Michael Richardson, to another woman, Anne-Marie Stretter.

The events of the Town ball are told by the narrator Jacques Hold, whom we later learn is Lol's lover. The following sentences begin Hold's "story of Lol Stein:" (Lol, 4) "The orchestra stopped playing. A set was just ending. The dance floor had emptied slowly. There was no one on it" (Lol, 5). The description reads like the start

²⁴³ Duras, *The Malady of Death*, p. 54.

²⁴⁴ Leslie Hill, *Marguerite Duras: Apocalyptic Desires* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 64.

of a play, and reflects Duras's dramatic style and influence. As readers, we are invited to enter into the "scene of desire" that Duras sets. Anne-Marie Stretter arrives as the music ends, a character that will later feature in Duras's *India Song*. She captures the attention of everyone in the room, including Lol, her schoolfriend Tatiana and Lol's fiancé, Michael Richardson. Questions begin to circulate on the dance floor: "Who was she?" [. . .] "Was she beautiful?" [. . .] "What had she, Anne-Marie Stretter, experienced that other women had missed? By what mysterious path had she arrived at what appeared to be a gay, a dazzling pessimism, a smiling indolence as light as a hint, as ashes?" (Lol, 6). Framing the description of Anne-Marie in questions suggests that she possesses something that is indescribable, something that seduces men and women and yet can only be gestured to, not represented in language. She is described in seemingly opposing terms "smiling" and "indolent," "light" and "ashes," which suggests her ability to be seductive and elusive, available and yet impossible to possess. Her beauty, for 'lack' of words, eludes everyone's grasp and establishes her as a 'supreme' object of desire.

Lol responds to her fiancé's betrayal with fascination instead of devastation: "Lol had watched [Michael and Anne-Marie Stretter], the way a woman whose heart is wholly unattached, a very old woman, watches her children leave her: she seemed to love them" (Lol, 8). Duras stages a very extraordinary scene of betrayal and abandonment. Instead of being consumed by jealousy and anger, Lol is enraptured and consumed by the "scene of desire" that she witnesses. Towards the end of the novel she confirms this detachment by stating "that from the first moment that woman walked into the room, I ceased to love my fiancé" (Lol, 126). This is perhaps the most unsettling line in the text and subverts any expectation a reader may have at

understanding or knowing Lol. It is possible that seeing Anne-Marie Stretter, this superior 'object' of desire made Lol feel inferior, perhaps she recognises a 'lack' in herself when confronted by the image of Anne-Marie Stretter? On the one hand, Lol is apathetic that she has lost her fiancé, and yet on the other, she is never the same after the Town ball. The central question of the novel is what causes Lol's illness?

The question of Lol's insanity frames the way the narration unfolds and situates 'lack' as Lol's defining feature. After the Town ball, Lol collapses, leaving the town to question and gossip about her condition: "But what is one to make of suffering which has no apparent cause?" (Lol, 13). Lol is no longer the same person she was before the night of the Town ball; now described with words such as "meekly," and as having the "odor of some long-unused object," (Lol, 19) she is no longer the radiant beauty who "slipped through [boys'] fingers like water" (Lol, 3). After her collapse, Lol is "married, without wanting to be" (Lol, 21); that is, she does not choose her husband because she loves him, rather she accepts him because he cannot replace her fiancé or "[betray] the exemplary abandon in which [her fiancé] had left her" (Lol, 21).

Several interpretations emerge to explain and answer the question of Lol's 'lack.' Tatiana, Lol's school friend and witness to her abandonment the night of the Town ball "does not believe that [the] fabled Town Beach ball was so overwhelmingly responsible for Lol Stein's illness"(Lol, 2). She claims that: "there was already something lacking in Lol, something which kept her from being [. . .] 'there'" (Lol, 3). Tatiana's uncertainty over what it is that Lol 'lacks' or what keeps her "from being 'there'" demonstrates the way Duras locates an absence in Lol but refuses to explain or define what it is. As Lol's only witness to her betrayal,

Tatiana's suggestion that Lol was "already lacking" undermines the focus and attention to the Town ball, thus making it difficult for a reader to determine exactly why Lol falls ill.

The townspeople explain Lol's condition from "the simple reason that she was jilted by the man from Town Beach," they suggest that she is paying "the price for the strange absence of pain she had experienced during the ball itself" (Lol, 15). This analysis, arising from gossip, reflects a more general or obvious assumption. By calling it a "simple reason" a reader is left to wonder and question whether there may be a more 'complicated' explanation. This narrative device encourages a reader to ask questions, pose solutions, and analyse the interpretations offered in the text, and yet, as discussed, no final 'solution' is offered.

There is an implicit suggestion that the 'lack' in Lol is due, in part, to the fact that she marries a man she is not in love with after she has been rejected by her fiancé. Duras touches on the 'lack' that arises for some women after marriage and childbirth. In an interview, Duras writes: "[women] are completely alone in their millions, in their poverty, in their comfort, and in their slums, in all their completely functional marriages – whether rich or poor. They are as alone as before."²⁴⁵ Duras suggests that despite a societal expectation that women who are wives and mothers should be happy, many in fact are not; they are lonely and suffering from a particular kind of madness.

Descriptions of Lol often define her in terms of how she satisfies her husband's desires not her own or they place her desires solely in relation to her

²⁴⁵ Marguerite Duras, "Interview with Susan Husserl-Kapit," in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, trans. Susan Husserl-Kapit, (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981), pp. 174-176, (p. 176); originally published in *Signs*, Winter, 1975.

husband's needs. Lol's husband describes her as: "[a] sleeping beauty who never offered a word of complaint, this upright sleeping beauty, this constant self-effacement which kept him moving back and forth between the forgetfulness and the rediscovery of her blondness, of this silken body which no awakening would ever change, of this constant, silent promise of something different which he called her gentleness, the gentleness of his wife" (Lol, 24). Lol is happy being thought of in terms of her husband and with the mundane rituals of her life that everyone claims are "perfect" (Lol, 24). There is a sense that she is happy to fulfil the role expected of her because it provides her with anonymity. After the attention drawn to her from the Town ball, she is happy in her obscurity. Yet, like the "she" in *The Malady of Death*, Lol is an enigma to the other characters, the reader and critic.

So far Lol fits within the representation of Lacanian 'lack.' The 'lack' in Lol and the similarities with a psychoanalytic 'lack' make it difficult to claim Lol as a representative of a feminist subject or even as a woman in control of her own desires. Hélène Cixous writes in *The Newly Born Woman*, somewhat optimistically perhaps, "we will never lack ourselves,"²⁴⁶ "we" referring to all women. In the case of Lol, however, her "self" appears to be exactly what she is lacking. "She" like the woman from Duras's *Malady of Death* is only in the text insofar as she is narrated or enjoyed by her desirer. So what is the feminist reader/critic to do? Before we, as readers or critics, can arrive at any final interpretations of this 'lack' in Lol, we must consider the fact that the events of her life, what we know of Lol, is mediated through Jacques Hold's surveillance and imagination.

²⁴⁶ Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, p. 100.

READING FOR THE ANALYST

As the narrator, Jacques Hold's observations and analyses of Lol dominate the text. It is difficult and problematic to separate the details of Lol's life from the fact that they are given to us, as readers, by Lol's lover. In other words we are given an interpretation of Lol from the perspective of someone else's desire and so it is possible to read his descriptions as a product of what he wants to see in Lol, not necessarily what is there. As Hold narrates: "As for the nineteen years preceding [the night of the Town ball], I do not want to know any more about them than what I tell [. . .] I am therefore going to look for [Lol], I shall pick her up at that moment in time which seems most appropriate, at that moment when it seems to me she first began to stir, to come toward me" (Lol, 4-5). As Hold admits, he is deliberately omitting details of Lol's life in order to substantiate his own understanding of Lol. Because we, as readers, understand Lol through the desiring gaze of Hold, we must be suspect of the information we are given and how Hold represents Lol.

Approximately one third of the way into the novel, Hold reveals himself: "I'm thirty-six years old, a member of the medical profession. I've been living in South Tahla only for a year. I'm in Peter Beugner's section at the State Hospital. I'm Tatiana Karl's lover." At this point, the reader learns that the explanations offered for Lol's 'lack' come from the narrator, Jacques Hold, Lol and Tatiana's lover. Already there is a perversion of the 'truth' or of the origins for Lol's 'lack.' This narrative device destabilises a reader's interpretation; s/he must return to the beginning and re-read the last 74 pages in order to re-learn the way s/he has come to 'know' Lol, for surely knowing her through a new lover is different from hearing the details from her husband or from her old friend Tatiana.

Hold's self-description reads like a medical profile: age, address, profession, and marital status. Narrative breaks such as "Here is my opinion" (Lol, 35) suggest his intrusive and diagnostic approach to Lol's history. Hold states his objective as follows: "To level the terrain, to dig down into it, to open the tombs wherein Lol is feigning death, seems to me fairer – given the necessity to fill in the missing links of Lol Stein's story – than to fabricate mountains, create obstacles, rely on chance" (Lol, 27). Instead of "creating obstacles, or relying on chance" Hold prefers to "fill in missing links" of Lol's story. In other words, instead of allowing her to formulate her own history, he will fill in the 'lack' he imagines to exist in her story. He will assemble the pieces he imagines she has lost in order to restore her sense of identity and to 'cure' her in a truly psychoanalytical sense.

Returning to some of the central ideas in Chapter Two, I want to suggest that Hold's narrative performs a similar splitting between a 'then' and a 'now' that H.D.'s *Tribute to Freud* demonstrates. Doubling back on himself, Hold creates a rupture in the constitution of Lol's identity. She is both the woman she is 'now' and the woman she was then. The narrative movement between Hold's observations and the dialogue between Hold and Lol or Tatiana and Hold displace any 'authority' or any 'one' way of analysing Lol's 'lack' or her desires. Hold assumes the position as the "subject who is supposed to know"²⁴⁷ and yet, as the narrative begins to demonstrate, Hold has very little control of the narrative of Lol's life. Clearly Duras intends the name play to reflect Hold's attempt and failure to 'know' Lol.

Jacques Hold is often described in ways that position him as an analyst figure to Lol. He can be read in psychoanalytic terms as voicing the question of the Other,

²⁴⁷ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 230-243.

or in Lacan's words, *Che vuoi?* 'What do you want?' The question of the Other leads the subject along his/her path towards desire. The 'path' is Lacan's shorthand for the analytic experience. As he argues:

That is why the question of the Other, which comes back to the subject from the place from which he expects an oracular reply in some such form as '*Che Vuoi?*', 'What do you Want?', is the one that best leads him to the path of his own desire – providing he sets out, with the help of the skills of a partner known as a psychoanalyst, to reformulate it, even without knowing it, as 'What does he want of me?'²⁴⁸

Without going into the varied processes this formation involves, such as transference and resistance, terms that have been explored elsewhere in this thesis, it is important to point out the role the analyst's assumes along the path of desire. Far from being an onlooker, the analyst is actively engaged in the deciphering and decoding of the patient's language and/or silence.

For example, Hold's observations of Lol place him in a position of an analyst or in Lacan's words, "the subject in the know." Statements such as: "[Lol] is trying to listen to some inner commotion, fails to, is overwhelmed by the realization, however incomplete, of her desire" (Lol, 120, 121) and "[Lol] is repressing some frightful pain to which she fails to yield" (Lol, 121) expose Hold's analytic gaze on Lol. These statements also reveal his conviction that he is the one to help Lol confront her desires.

Indeed, it is possible to construct a reading in which Hold assumes an analyst role and helps Lol to confront and resolve the 'lack' he diagnoses her as having from

²⁴⁸ Jacques Lacan. *Écrits: A Selection*, p. 312.

the beginning of the text. As suggested before, Hold connects the 'lack' in Lol with the events of the Town ball. Throughout the text, Hold is involved in telling Lol's story, which can be interpreted as an attempt to provide her with a sense of self, or to constitute her desires with his own.

At the end of the novel, Hold returns with Lol to the Town Beach so that she can come to terms with the events of the ball. This return to the scene of the town ball can be read as a literalisation of what happens in an analytic session. Instead of talking Lol through the events as she remembers them, as an analyst might do, Hold returns with her to the physical site of her trauma in order to help her confront her relationship to the past. Lol tells Hold that she could not return to the Town beach without him. She tells him: "I realized that without you there was no point in going. I wouldn't have recognized anything" (Lol, 157). Her admission that she would not "have recognized anything" without Hold, reassures his position as an analyst of her experiences.

As the train takes Hold and Lol to the Town beach, Lol begins to recall and recognise the events that took place ten years before, when her fiancé left her for Anne-Marie Stretter. At the same time, Hold begins to formulate and recognise his own role within Lol's return: "Now the hour of my entering Lol Stein's memory is at hand. The ball will be at the end of the trip, it will fall like a house of cards, as this trip is presently falling [. . .] In the future it will be today's vision she will recall, this companion beside her in the train. This trip, in the future, will be like the town of South Tahla is for her now, lying in ruins beneath her footsteps of the present" (Lol, 165). For Hold, the ball represents the final 'solution' to the 'lack' he sees in Lol. He sets up a confrontation, which can be interpreted as an analytic 'session' as the

moment in which he will 'cure' Lol and replace her desire for her fiancé with her desire for him.

Hold's comment upon their return suggests that their 'sessions' have ended: "I refuse to admit the end which is probably going to come and separate us, how easy it will be, how distressingly simple, for the moment I refuse to accept it, to accept this end, I accept the other, the end which has still to be invented, the end I do not yet know, that no one has invented: the endless end, the endless beginning of Lol Stein" (Lol, 174-175). His comment also reflects the "endless end" of Duras's text. Although they return to the 'scene' of the trauma, nothing happens to reveal any further meaning or explanation for the 'lack' in Lol. As readers, we are no closer to a 'truth' about Lol than we are in the beginning. Hold has not 'cured' Lol, nor has he arrived at any conclusions about her suffering. In fact, as Hold gets closer to the physical 'origin' for Lol's 'lack,' or to the place he believes responsible for Lol's suffering, his 'hold' on the narrative begins to break down. He begins to lose control over the narration of Lol's life.

Hold's analysis of Lol is far from stable; it is continually interrupted by narrative intrusions that make it difficult for the reader to decide who is 'in charge' of telling Lol's story. For example, the narration abruptly shifts from Hold's first person analysis to a narrative perspective that can 'see' Hold in his pursuit of Lol: "He scanned the boulevard in the vicinity of the cinema. Lol had taken refuge back around the corner of the building. Behind him, in her gray coat, Lol, unmoving, waits for him to make up his mind which way to go" (Lol, 43). Hold imagines that he is guiding Lol along the path of her desire, and yet the sense we get, as readers, is that he is following her, tracing her movements and trying to bring order and sense to

them. The narrative intrusions break down his authority over her desire and allow the reader to follow his construction of Lol, for it is more construction work that Hold is involved in than the unearthing he imagines. He is putting things together, building up his interpretation, rather than digging into Lol's account of her life.

In this way, Duras exposes the inconsistencies of the analytic narrative. Not only is the analytic narrative subject to the feeling or emotional blindsights of the analyst, but the analysand is capable of evading his watchful gaze. S/he can hide behind the "corner of language" (Lol, 39) in order to resist his/her analysis. Like Lol, the analysand can anticipate the steps the analyst will take next, or wait to see the direction s/he will take in analysis. In doing so, the analysand can provide the analyst with what he is looking for, what he desires, as opposed to what the analysand desires, although Lol's desire remains unclear throughout the text.

Although Hold believes the Town ball is the origin for Lol's suffering, his trip to the Town beach with Lol does not reveal any final meanings or explanations. He fails to uncover any 'truth' about Lol. Hold's 'failure' suggests that the act of giving something meaning, of signifying the Town ball as an origin for Lol's suffering, excludes the possibility that there is no meaning to grasp. In this way, Duras demonstrates the impulse in psychoanalytic structures to enforce signification – to make meaning. The text also implies that Lol's suffering may not have an explanation or secret meaning to uncover. However, instead of examining the possibilities in the lack of conclusion in Duras's texts, critics have largely tried to make meaning of the non-meaning.

ANALYSING THE ANALYST

Jacques Hold is a central concern in psychoanalytic and feminist criticism on *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*. For example, Kimberly Philpot Van Noort argues for reading Hold as an analyst in her article "The Dance of the Signifier: Jacques Lacan and Marguerite Duras's *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*." Van Noort suggests that Hold not only represents the analyst's perspective, but is "caught in a full-blown case of transference [. . .] so much so that his own identity is seemingly absorbed by [Lol's.]" Van Noort takes her argument a step further by suggesting that the breakdown of Hold's narration can be read as demonstrating Lol's feminising influence on Hold. She argues that "Duras's novel points to the possibility of a 'feminine' signifier, singularly distinguished by its quality of absence."²⁴⁹ Van Noort understands absence in *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein* to be at the centre of a process, "one which lacks neither identity nor the power to signify."²⁵⁰

Van Noort's analysis offers her readers an alternative way to engage with the 'lack' that is central to Duras's novel. And yet, she connects this absence to the signification of the Phallus, which situates her argument within a psychoanalytic framework. Following Lacan's lead in his "'Hommage fait à Marguerite Duras,'" Van Noort reads the text as offering no possibility of castration because the Town ball is never given a final meaning.²⁵¹ Instead of acknowledging the possibility that the Town ball has no final meaning, Van Noort argues that this 'lack' of meaning reflects the absence of castration. In this way, Van Noort supplies meaning where she sees no meaning, as if to make the ending mean something, when it may not. In the

²⁴⁹ Van Noort, "The Dance of the Signifier," p. 195.

²⁵⁰ Van Noort, "The Dance of the Signifier," p. 200, footnote 4.

²⁵¹ Van Noort, "The Dance of the Signifier," p. 195.

same way that Hold is desperate to 'solve' Lol, Van Noort appears to want to 'solve' the ambiguity of the text by providing it with an answer: no meaning means no castration.

John O'Brien reaches a similar conclusion in his essay on *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein* entitled "Metaphor Between Lacan and Duras." O'Brien, also drawing heavily from Lacan's essay, argues that Hold's efforts to figure Lol's identity implicate him in a loss of his own identity "by replaying the castrative moment with Lol in the phallic role."²⁵² In both examples, Lacan's theoretical interpretation of the Phallus and castration, as well as his theories on "regard" and "vision" are mapped onto Duras's text in order to fill the absence with meaning. Both Van Noort and O'Brien take a suggestion made by Lacan in order to find it in Duras's text. Although these analyses may secure Lacan's place within literary criticism, they do so at the expense of Duras's text. That is, the theoretical mapping limits and constricts the possibility for desire to be figured as "endless." In the case of *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*, psychoanalytic critics with Lacanian tools in hand repeat what Lacan asserts and in so doing not only support his claim but subjugate Duras's fiction to his theoretical framework. In the same way, the interpretations that focus on the character Hold subjugate the story of Lol.²⁵³

And yet, psychoanalytic critics are not the only ones who focus on Hold's character in a way that restricts the possibilities in Duras's text; feminist critics such

²⁵² John O'Brien, "Metaphor Between Lacan and Duras," p. 240.

²⁵³ Ironically, Van Noort argues that Lacan's comparison between Duras and Marguerite de Navarre can be read as an attempt to gain mastery over the text: "In a subtle twist, Marguerite Duras disappears from Lacan's article as the image of Marguerite de Navarre slowly appears, the first becoming absence as the other becomes present. The resonance with the novel is strong, as is the play on names of Lol V. Stein and Tatiana Karl (ravisher and ravished) become interchangeable," "The Dance of the Signifier," p. 198.

as Laurie Edson and Emma Wilson attempt to interpret and, in a sense, to solve the relationship between Hold and Lol. However, before discussing examples of feminist criticism on Duras's *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*, I would first like to clarify my use of the term 'feminist framework' in order to avoid confusion. As discussed in the first chapter, although Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray offer feminists useful and constructive ways of re-considering psychoanalytic interpretations, their work often weaves itself back into the arguments they differ from and in so doing, provide little alternative to psychoanalytic models. On the other hand, theories that consider both perspectives in an effort to think through dynamic and complicated issues, theories such as Diane Elam argues in *Feminism and Deconstruction*, offer feminists an alternative approach to thinking through questions such as 'woman' or desire. In short, I am distinguishing between two models or frameworks available to feminists. One opposes the models it disputes or seeks to establish 'woman' or the feminine in a position beyond a male or masculine parameter. The other 'brand' of feminism interrogates the dynamics at play in a structure or logic in order to confront the way they are intertwined, and to pose alternatives that do not simply substitute one restrictive construct with another, but attempt to escape the circular pull of these theoretical models altogether.

Feminist critics, such as Laurie Edson, read Hold's character as representative of the male narrator who is struggling to grasp the enigma of woman and/or of truth, Edson argues: "In representing a male narrator who is ostensibly unable to represent a female character, Duras has ingeniously represented unrepresentability while foregrounding the inevitable failure of any quest to solve the

enigma of woman and/or truth.”²⁵⁴ I am uneasy with Edson’s elision of ‘woman’ and ‘truth,’ not only because of the problems it generates for feminism, but also because Duras problematises the relationship between ‘woman’ and ‘truth’ in her work. By resisting a final solution to Lol’s ‘lack,’ Duras delays any final ‘answer’ or ‘truth’ to why she is lacking. Also, in leaving the ending ambiguous, Duras resists revealing a ‘truth’ about Lol and thus avoids any elision between ‘truth’ and ‘woman.’ Although she does position Lol as “the object of some secret” (Lol, 49), her resistance to revealing any ‘truth’ about Lol undermines the possibility of uncovering anything about this “secret.” A reader is forced to question whether there was or is a ‘secret’ or hidden meaning to solve in the first place.

I would also argue that Hold’s “failure” to represent Lol has less to do with gender than Edson suggests. Instead, Hold’s “failure” begins with his attempt to grasp Lol’s story in the first place. The text demonstrates that any attempt made by character or reader to grasp hold of a ‘truth’ will end in “failure” (irrespective of gender). Edson’s argument falls into a feminist framework that attempts to reverse a masculine structure by noting its failures and inconsistencies. However, in doing so she overlooks the inability of *either* gender to control the narrative.

Emma Wilson’s critique of *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*, although persuasively argued, falls into similar problems with gender. Wilson argues in *Sexuality and the Reading Encounter* that Hold’s lack of narrative control can be contrasted with Tatiana’s narrative who “as lover, not analyst, becomes the key to both reincarnation and carnality in within the text.”²⁵⁵ Wilson argues that Tatiana

²⁵⁴ Laurie Edson, “Knowing Lol: Duras, Epistemology and Gendered Mediation,” pp. 26-27.

²⁵⁵ Emma Wilson, *Sexuality and the Reading Encounter: Identity and Desire in Proust, Duras, Tournier, and Cixous* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 175.

functions as Lol's double, and as such, Lol has a chance to replay the trauma of the town ball through her relationship with Tatiana. However, reading Tatiana as Lol's double or witness to the trauma of the town ball is no more stable than reading Hold as analyst. Although Tatiana's relationship to Lol may be different, as Wilson suggests in her reading, she is no more 'truthful' or 'accurate' as narrator of Lol's life than Hold.

Instead of, or as well as, reading Hold as representative of the failure of either an analytical or masculine narrative, I prefer to read the loss of control in Hold's narrative as reflecting a shift in the relationship between desirer and desired. Although Lol is described as an object in the beginning of the novel, as the novel progresses Hold's objectivity also becomes suspect. Hold admits: "[Lol] loves, loves the man who must love Tatiana. No one. No one loves Tatiana in me. I belong to a perspective which she is in the process of constructing with impressive obstinacy, I shall not resist. Tatiana, little by little, is forcing her way in, is breaking down the doors" (Lol, 122). Hold recognises that he is an object to Lol's reconstruction of the Town ball. He imagines that Lol wants to recreate being on the outside of a passion between two people. And so instead of watching Michael Richardson and Anne-Marie Stretter, she wants to watch Hold and Tatiana. However, as the passage reveals, by participating in a fantasy he imagines Lol to have, Hold is denying his own desire to be with Lol.

Duras undermines any confidence that we, as readers or critics, may have in Hold's narration of Lol's story through Hold's admissions that he is actually the object of Lol's desire instead of the other way around. The first half of the novel leads us to believe that Lol is the object of Hold's desire as well as the object of a

profound rejection, whereas the second half of the novel develops Lol's subjective role through Hold's admissions that he is in fact an object of Lol's fantasy, not his own. He tells us that he "had to know [Lol], because such was her desire" (Lol, 75), which shifts his penetrative gaze on Lol to her demands of him.

I am not suggesting simply that Hold's loss of subjectivity can be equated with Lol's acquisition of subjectivity; that is, I am not taking sides with Van Noort's or Edson's criticism that Hold's narrative be read as representing a "failure" of an analytical or masculine narrative. Although both of these arguments can be supported in the text to a certain extent, neither takes into account why Lol returns to the rye fields at the end of the novel. Lol's return to the rye fields can be interpreted in distinctly different ways. To identify a few: either Lol returns to assume her role as voyeur or she assumes her desire to be outside the relationship between two people, or she positions herself as an object to Hold's desire. In other words, Lol can be constructed as an object or subject to her desires or the desires of an Other. No conclusive reading can be drawn.

I am arguing here that the narrative shifts positions between Hold and Lol in terms of object and subject so much so that it is difficult to determine when Hold is the object or when Lol is the subject and vice versa. Instead of trying to pin down or fix the text into supporting one or the other as subject or object, it is possible to read both as objects and subjects to the desire in the text. In doing so, critical focus is placed on the movement between desirer and desired and how desire functions rather than on the roles of subject and object positions.

In this way, Duras's depiction of desire in her fiction is more in line with the model of the "ms. en abyme" that Diane Elam theorises or the "both/and" that

Schneeman demonstrates through her work. As discussed in chapter one, the “*ms. en abyme*” problematises the relationship between subject and object in representation. In the “*ms. en abyme*,” the movement between subject and object is fluid and unstable. The object’s endless regression into itself escapes the subject’s hold, which leads to a destabilisation of the subject itself. Following out of this logic, women can be neither subject nor object (and in the same way, men can be neither subject nor object).

Using the framework of the “*ms. en abyme*,” desirer and desired can be figured as always in motion, as continuously changing positions with each other instead of as fulfilling particular roles set out for them in a static and fixed logic. The fluidity of these roles is particularly important to a feminist rethinking of desire. Instead of trying to refigure woman as subject, it is possible to consider the role of desired and desirer as infinitely changing positions in the movement of desire. That is, neither man nor woman determines or is determined by a position of desire. Instead of trying to raise woman to a position equal to man or even higher, or to cure the ‘lack’ she is given by psychoanalysis, Duras’s representation of woman in her fiction suggest that it is possible to focus on how each position in desire functions as well as how desire creates connections and builds foundations. In other words, we, as readers and critics, are invited to think about the productive possibilities and the limitations in the movement of desire.

On the one hand, it is possible to argue that Duras, in situating ‘lack’ in her female characters and yet not leaving them as objects, suggests that there is subjectivity in ‘lack.’ That is, shifting the positions between Hold and Lol (and even Tatiana) Duras contends that each position, whether object, subject or voyeur, has

both a subjective and objective role in desire. However, to claim for a power in 'lack' is to embrace a negative, a politics that could be linked to Hélène Cixous's claim in *The Newly Born Woman* that "we are 'black' and we are beautiful."²⁵⁶ Cixous explodes the binary oppositions that she believes structure knowledge and culture. In saying "we are 'black' and we are beautiful" she is challenging the negative binary that women are often aligned with, while men assume the 'positive or white' end of the opposition. However, as argued in Chapter One, to take one side of an opposition is not necessarily to release oneself from the dominating influence of that opposition.

Duras maintains a 'lack' in desire, both through her characterisations and through her resistance to any textual 'arrival.' That is, her narratives resist any *one* or singular reading or framework. The resistance to one reading functions as a guarantee that the desire in the text is not solved which leaves the reader with questions, not answers. The reader is left to consider the desire in the text and how it functions rather than 'solve' desire, which would put at end to its movement in the text. Duras's alternative construction of 'lack' demands that her feminist reader understand how it functions, or rather, how it could function, before s/he abandon the possibility altogether. Her texts make it possible to read desire as mediated either by a masculine or patriarchal influence or by one's own desires. In either case, desire is not allowed to 'arrive' at a final 'solution,' which keeps it 'in motion.'

²⁵⁶ Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, p.69.

THE DESIRE FOR LOL

Returning again to the text itself, I want to argue that the desire to know and understand Lol V. Stein is not confined to Jacques Hold or Tatiana Karl, characters in the novel, but extends to her readers, her critics and even to Duras herself:

Lol V. Stein. Mad. Brought to a halt at the dance at South Tahla. She stops there. It's the dance that grows, making concentric circles round her, bigger and bigger. Now the dance, the sound of the dance, has reached as far as New York. Now, of all the characters in my books, Lol V. Stein comes top of the list. It's a funny thing. She's the one who 'sells' the best. My little madwoman.²⁵⁷

Duras's claim to Lol, expressed in the phrase "my little madwoman," reflects the way the characters in the novel, the reader and the critic all participate in an attempt to grasp hold of Lol's narrative.²⁵⁸ "She stops there:" in other words, the text ends and yet the circles of interpretation grow and expand around Duras's "little madwoman."

Instead of reading for a definitive history of Lol, I prefer to read the struggle to define Lol as a dual struggle between psychoanalysis and feminism to grasp hold of an elusive and enigmatic 'woman.' In order to construct an alternative reading of female desire, as this thesis attempts to do, one must first read through

²⁵⁷ Marguerite Duras, *Practicalities: Marguerite Duras speaks to Jérôme Beaujour*, trans. Barbara Bray (London: Flamingo, 1990), p. 29.

²⁵⁸ In *Sexuality and the Reading Encounter*, Emma Wilson argues that to a certain degree Duras participates in establishing Lol's elusive character. She argues: "Duras herself may be seen to collaborate in the framing of her novel as a case history, whose subject and heroine becomes synonymous with the complex the text itself may seek to analyze. Yet Duras works to undermine, too, any possibility of finite analysis or knowledge within the text. Her own remarks are suitably tenuous, dissolving any fixed interpretation the reader may have salvaged," p.165. Also in *Practicalities*: Duras claims that all the women in her books, regardless of age, are based on the character of Lol V. Stein," pp. 27-28.

psychoanalytic interpretations as they dominate and underline western theories on sexuality. In other words, the reader of desire must first read through the narrative of female desire as seen through the eyes of psychoanalysis. If we read this in terms of *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*, the reader first encounters Hold's descriptions of Lol, without knowing his position at first. It is only later in the text that the reader becomes aware s/he is reading a 'biased' and unstable account of Lol's history. Reading Hold as an analyst figure, as some critics have done, the reader must then reconstruct his/her reading to understand the way in which Hold may be biased or may have transferred his affections for Lol onto his narrative of her story. In a similar way, the reader of female desire must return and review the accounts made by psychoanalysis in order to construct an alternative view.

However, in reading the psychoanalytic account, it becomes very difficult for the reader to remember how s/he was influenced and by whom. As readers, we are looking for an origin to Lol's madness. Like the characters in the novel, we are trying to discover why she is lacking, instead of reading her as fulfilled. This is a crucial distinction and one that both psychoanalysis and feminism are 'guilty' of. Both psychoanalysis and feminism want to fill a 'lack' in the representation of a woman. Psychoanalysis imagines this 'lack' in woman is constituted by male desires. Feminism on the other hand may argue that the 'lack' should be filled by the woman herself – through self-awareness, knowledge of her own desires. Either is prescriptive, and limiting. In the case of Lol, Hold believes that she only desires to be a voyeur of a couple she is intimately involved with, which means neither he nor Tatiana can 'have' her. Her desires fall outside his own.

If Hold is representative of the psychoanalytic 'hold' on female desire, then

Tatiana reflects the restrictive view of some feminist readings on female desire. Instead of reading Tatiana as Lol's double, as Wilson does convincingly,²⁵⁹ I would argue that Tatiana is Lol's opposite. One has been married for ten years, has three children and stays at home; the other is married although is currently having an affair and has no children. The only thing they have in common is free time and Jacques Hold.

The two women can be read as having taken the two options Duras envisions are open to women: to settle down and have children, or to remain free from those responsibilities. As Tatiana tells Lol: "There were two choices open to me from the start: to live the way we used to when we were young, open to a whole range of possibilities, you remember, or else settle down into a fixed pattern, the way you have, you know what I mean, please don't take offence, but you know" (Lol, 84). What Tatiana expects Lol to 'know' is that she has taken one path, the one with possibilities and Lol has taken the other, the fixed path. As readers we know that the path Lol takes is not fixed by her marriage or by her role as mother, as Tatiana assumes. Tatiana's assessment of Lol's life and position is reflective of the somewhat unspoken view many feminists have about a woman's decision to be *just* a mother and wife.²⁶⁰ There is a subtle implication that choosing to be a mother and wife limits and defines you as a woman in ways that being free with your sexuality or with the other possibilities life presents does not. On the surface, and to Tatiana, Lol is nothing more than a dutiful wife and mother, and yet we are led to believe through Hold's narration that Lol is open to and engaged in other sexual possibilities. Not

²⁵⁹ Wilson, *Sexuality and the Reading Encounter*, pp. 172-180.

²⁶⁰ I am placing the word 'just' in italics to underline that very few if any feminists suggest that being a mother is easy or invaluable, rather the suggestion is that in choosing to be *just* a mother, a woman often loses her own identity to her children's needs and desires.

only does this disrupt Tatiana's reading of Lol but it may also challenge some of the assumptions that are deemed acceptable in the feminist arena. Feminist viewpoints and experiences may reflect both Tatiana and Hold's accounts of Lol, but neither can capture the essence of Lol nor know the truth about her wanderings. Even as readers, we are left unsure whether to believe what we have read of Lol.

In taking a critical step backwards from the desire to 'know' Lol it is possible to see the way in which characters like Hold and Tatiana represent the need to gain mastery and authority over the narrative of desire. It is also clear that attempts to do are unsuccessful. Duras represents the impossibility of maintaining authority or mastery over the narrative of desire, whether psychoanalytic or feminist, and the failure that inevitably accompanies the act of interpretation. As Leslie Hill argues: "any reading of Duras's novel that seeks to establish the veracity of the story of Lol, whether based in Lacanian psychoanalysis or on the certitudes of female experiences, is bound to fail."²⁶¹

REPLAYING THE SCENE OF DESIRE

In order to further examine the way in which Duras's texts resist final interpretations and 'narrative cures,' I turn to an earlier novel by Duras entitled, *Moderato Cantabile*. In his essay on knowledge and repetition, Michael Sheringham argues that "since 1964, with *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*, [Duras] had freed herself from the thematic and generic constraints which enabled a book like *Moderato Cantabile* to be readable in terms of fairly traditional psychological and metaphysical

²⁶¹ Hill, *Apocalyptic Desires*, p.73.

schemes.”²⁶² As Sheringham suggests, Duras develops her use of analytic processes in *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein* which makes the latent suggestions in *Moderato Cantabile* more accessible. For this reason, I have chosen to analyse these texts in a reverse chronological order.

The opening scene of *Moderato Cantabile* introduces the reader to Anne Desbaresdes and her son in the middle of his piano lessons: “‘Will you please read what’s written above the score?’ the lady asked. ‘Moderato Cantabile,’ said the child [. . .] ‘And what does moderato cantabile mean?’ ‘I don’t know.’”²⁶³ The struggle to make the child say what moderato cantabile means continues amidst his mother’s excuses and apologies. Several levels of interpretation open up in this scene alone. A child is trying to interpret the annotations in the margins of a musical score. His teacher, frustrated with his reluctance to answer her, interprets his behaviour as reflective of his mother’s bad parenting. The child’s mother looks at the situation and interprets her child’s stubborn behaviour in terms of herself. She is shocked and yet pleased that she has such a difficult child (MC, 14).

‘*Moderato cantabile*’ appears in the margins of the music that the child is supposed to be performing. It is a musical term that reflects the composer’s interpretation of how the score should be played. In Madame Girard’s room the child is trying to learn how to play the piano; he is trying to learn what things signify, how he is supposed to make sense and interpret the notes he sees in front of him. The child is confronted with the terms that are laid out in front of him, just as we, as readers, encounter the signs of *Moderato Cantabile* as text.

²⁶² Michael Sheringham, “Knowledge and Repetition in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*,” *Romance Studies*, No.2, Summer (1983), pp. 124-140, (p. 125).

²⁶³ Marguerite Duras, *Moderato Cantabile*, trans. Richard Seaver (London: Calder Publications, 1997, originally published 1958), p. 11. Subsequent references will appear in the text after “MC.”

Intrusions from the outside world interrupt the piano lessons: the purring engine of a motorboat, the sound of the sea, and the pink hues of the sunset. These images distract the child from his task of defining 'moderato cantabile.' They also distract the reader, who in trying to figure out what this scene means finds him/herself seduced by the images Duras evokes of the outside world. In this way, Duras suggests that attempts to make meaning of her text will end in failure, they will also miss the sensual and evocative images that exist in the margins of the act of interpretation. Duras encourages her readers to inhabit the desire she narrates instead of interpreting it; instead of forcing one meaning, the narration opens up the possibility of multiple readings.

By juxtaposing an interpretative act with a sensual or stimulating image, Duras implies that desire arises from a combination of understanding and non-understanding or knowledge and non-knowledge, which leaves desire as something which can be talked about, analysed, and yet never fully understood or defined. Her narrative also suggests that the act of interpretation, the retelling of the story, incorporates within its structure the interpreter or reader's desire, which changes the structure of the story itself.

To take this a step further it is necessary to explain the central events in the text. The novel revolves around a *crime passionnel*; a man shoots his wife in a café. The *crime passionnel* is the central image in the novel and is repeated again and again through the discussions between Anne and a man she meets in the café where the murder takes place. Their meetings together in the café can be read as their attempts to interpret the lover's intention for the crime. As they reconstruct the events, to play

at being the lovers, they enter in their own desires (like a musician does with music) which changes the structure of the *crime passionnel*.

The drama of the *crime passionnel* takes place outside the house where Anne's son is learning to play the piano. The shouts from the streets draw her into the scene, making her an eyewitness to the event. Through the café windows Anne sees a man hovering over the body of his dead wife: "He turned and looked at the crowd; they saw his eyes, which were expressionless, except for the stricken, indelible, inward look of his desire" (MC, 19). The *crime passionnel* functions as a break; the murder gives her an excuse to enter the café and an opportunity to step outside her role as mother and wife.

Like Lol, Anne is in a "completely functional marriage" and yet very lonely. The narrative suggests she is 'lacking' any ambition of her own; she is defined solely in terms of her husband: "You are Madame Desbaresdes. The wife of the manager of Import Export et des Fonderies de la Côte. You live on the Boulevard de la Mer" (MC, 32). And yet Anne's husband, like Lol's, is almost entirely absent from the text. Although they are both alluded to, Lol's husband more than Anne's, they are silent figures in the lives of both women. This absence, in part, suggests an inadequacy on the husbands to participate in a desiring relationship with their wives. It is implied in each, although not stated, that neither woman is in love or sexually involved with her husband. And yet, both Anne's and Lol's involvement with another man is not figured as a consequence of sexual desire but rather as a way of working through an emotional desire. In this way, Duras distinguishes the 'other' man as someone who is guiding Lol or Anne toward her desire, rather than simply someone she is having an 'affair' with.

The narrative implies that the *crime passionnel* has a transformative effect on Anne, similar to the effect the Town ball has on Lol. Instead of following their everyday schedule, Anne returns with her son to the café where the murder took place. While in the café, Anne deviates from her 'usual' behaviour by ordering a glass of wine. As the narrator emphasises: "It was obvious that [Anne] was not used to drinking wine, and that at this hour of the day she was generally doing something quite different" (MC, 28). Not only is Anne "doing something quite different" but she is in a place where she does not necessarily belong; she is in a bar generally frequented by workers from her husband's foundry; as the narrative implies: "Two customers came in. They recognised this woman at the bar and were surprised" (MC, 28). The *crime passionnel* is set up by the narrative as a catalyst in Anne's life; after she witnesses the murder she is never the same nor is her relationship to her husband and son. However, why the murder has such a profound effect on her life remains unanswered.

Duras develops the novel largely through the conversations between Anne and a man she meets at the café. In the first instance we, as readers, are led to believe that the man Anne speaks to is not entirely unknown to her. She tells him: "I recognise you" (MC, 27), to which he replies "There was a murder" (MC, 27), and then, somewhat curiously, the text reads: "Anne Desbaresdes told a lie" (MC, 27). Her "lie" is seemingly uncomplicated – she tells him: "I see . . . I was just wondering," (MC, 27) – a way to move past his dismissal of her recognition. However, this brief and seemingly innocuous exchange is anything but innocent as we learn much later in the text. Like *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*, Duras teases her reader by delaying the revelation of important information. Duras waits to reveal that

the man Anne begins to meet daily in a café is an unemployed worker from her husband's foundry. Chauvin, whose name we learn halfway through the text, has seen Anne before at company events, a detail that appears towards the end of the novel. The delay of information in Duras's texts derails its readers and unsettles whatever interpretations they have been constructing.

Anne and Chauvin's discussion about the murder often mirrors what is happening between them. For example, the following passage, referring to the *crime passionnel*, could also be read as a description of what is happening so far in the text between Anne and Chauvin: "‘And so they talked,’ said Anne Desbaresdes, ‘they talked for a long time, a very long time, before it happened.’ ‘Yes I think they must have spent a lot of time together to reach that stage. Talk to me.’ ‘I don’t know what else to say,’ she admitted. He gave her an encouraging smile. ‘What difference does it make?’”(MC, 46-47). The narration often moves fluidly between Anne and Chauvin's speculations on the crime to their interactions which makes it difficult for a reader to determine whether they are talking about themselves or the couple in the *crime passionnel*. Chauvin's reply suggests that their conversation about the crime is only a pretence for their meetings in the café and yet we are left uncertain whether or not there is a 'true' reason

The conversations between Anne and Chauvin play with the boundaries between what is known or 'true' and what is unknown and abstract. As readers we are left wondering what the nature of their relationship is and whether or not they are having an affair. Duras provides just enough information, both within their conversations and from the onlookers in the café, to spark curiosity about their involvement and yet defers any final answers or conclusions. I have quoted the

following passage at length in order to demonstrate the narrative ambiguity in the discussions between Anne and Chauvin:

Lots of women have already lived in that same house and listened to the hedges at night, in place of their hearts. The hedges have always been there. They all died in their room behind that beech tree which, by the way, you're wrong about: it has stopped growing.' 'That's as much a lie as what you told me about their finding that woman dead drunk every night.' 'Yes, that's a lie too. But this house is enormous. [. . .] 'Hurry up and say something. Make it up.' She made an effort; her voice was almost loud in the café, which was still empty. 'People ought to live in a town where there are no trees trees (sic) scream when there's a wind here there's always a wind always except for two days a year in your place don't you see I'd leave this place I wouldn't stay all the birds or almost all are seagulls you find them dead after a storm and when the storm is over the trees stop screaming you hear them screaming on the beach like someone murdered it keeps the children from sleeping no I'll leave.' She paused, her eyes still shut with fear. He looked at her attentively. 'Perhaps we're wrong,' he said, 'perhaps he wanted to kill her right away, the first time he saw her. Talk to me (MC, 61-63).

This passage demonstrates the ambiguity and confusion within the discourse between Anne and Chauvin. It is difficult to determine whether they are referring to the *crime passionnel* or to Anne's life or to something else entirely. It is also hard to distinguish between Anne's response and Chauvin's at times; Duras often runs the dialogue together, making them indistinguishable at times.

On the one hand, the text implies that Chauvin encourages Anne to talk about her life, particularly her 'home' life, in order to get her to recognise that she should leave her husband and son. However, the text does not suggest that Chauvin wants Anne to leave for him, but rather to leave town or to want her own death. In other words, the narrative develops the beginning of a second *crime passionnel*, this time between Anne and Chauvin. If he convinces her that she has nothing to live for, then he may also convince her to stage a scene like the one they both witnessed in the café, except that in this *crime passionnel* not only will they know why the man shot the woman, but they will play those roles.

The suggestion that Anne and Chauvin are trying to understand the motives behind the two lovers in order to play the roles themselves is an unsettling and confusing one. The text does not fully substantiate why Anne would want to die, except that in passages, such as the one cited, there is a suggestion that Anne is unhappy and in a loveless marriage. Anne's response to Chauvin, the only one in the novel without any syntax, emphasises her own desperation and misery and yet also reveals her subjectivity; the "I" in the passage affirms her individual desire to leave.

Although the majority of the novel takes place in the café where Anne and Chauvin discuss the events of the *crime passionnel*, Duras somewhat curiously adds two chapters before the final one which serve to emphasise the effect these café meetings have on her role as mother and wife. The way Duras describes Anne makes it clear that she has undergone a transformation. Although she and Chauvin spend their afternoons talking and interpreting an imaginary affair between the dead woman and her lover, it is obvious through these final chapters that the town believes Anne to be engaged in an affair with Chauvin. In other words, their 'non-affair' has the

same or similar consequences to a 'real' affair.

The effects of Anne and Chauvin's 'imaginary' affair are made explicit when Anne takes her son to his piano lessons for a second time. Once again her son refuses to do as he is told by his instructor which leads her to judge Anne for her poor discipline: "You ought to be ashamed, Madame Desbaresdes," said Mademoiselle Giraud. "So they say," (MC, 72) Anne replies, with an implied tone of dismissal. Her comments reveal that there are other people, apart from Mademoiselle Giraud, who believe Anne should be "ashamed" of her behaviour, rather explicitly referring to her meetings with Chauvin. And yet, her comment also reveals a detachment or inevitability, as if the circumstances are out of her control and already in place. Duras suggests a cause and effect relationship between the child's reluctant acquiescence to play the musical piece and Anne's fate, which is being decided whether or not she wants it to be: "The sonatina still resounded, borne like a feather by this young barbarian, whether he liked it or not, and showered again on his mother, sentencing her anew to the damnation of her love. The gates of hell bang shut" (MC, 77). Duras makes it clear that something has happened to Anne; a transformation has taken place. And yet a reader is no closer to understanding why she is sentenced to "damnation" or what Duras means when she writes: "the gates of hell bang shut." As readers, we can infer from the language that Anne awaits a tormented fate, but Duras leaves it unclear why.

As if to dispel any doubts a reader may have that Anne has changed or that those around her have cast judgement on her actions, Duras draws attention to Anne's inability to control herself during a societal dinner party hosted by Anne and her husband. The party marks the first event in which Anne must perform her role as

wife and hostess. Arriving late to the party after drinking with Chauvin, Anne is unable to engage with her guests or to join in the polite discussion at the dinner table. Duras contrasts Anne with the other women at the party whose “bare shoulders have the gloss and solidity of a society founded and built on the certitudes of its rights” (MC, 101); Anne is described as a “wild animal” (MC, 99) with “wildly protruding eyes” (MC, 98) and a “warmth [that] fires her witch’s loins” (MC, 105). The narrative makes it clear that Anne is no longer able to control herself or her desires, although it does not specify what these desires are or whom they are for.

The descriptions of Anne reflect the opinions of those around her, the townspeople who decide that she and Chauvin are having an affair. However, as readers, we are given no confirmation of an affair between Anne and Chauvin in the narrative. Apart from their meetings in the café, there is no suggestion in the text that they have met elsewhere to consummate any passionate feelings they may have for each other. Their conversations provide the only insight into their ‘affair’ and do not reveal a desire or even a ‘hidden’ desire. Instead, Duras suggests that relationship revolves solely around their shared interest in re-enacting the *crime passionnel* they witness at the start of the novel.

In the final scene, Anne initiates an end to the imaginary affair that has now developed between Anne and Chauvin in the minds of their onlookers: “Their hands were so cold they were touching only in intention, an illusion, in order for this to be fulfilled, for the sole reason that it should be fulfilled, none other” (MC, 115-116). With icy formality Anne kisses Chauvin in what Duras describes as a “mortuary ritual” (MC, 118). The implicit suggestion is that Anne and Chauvin stage a confirmation of their affair for their onlookers in order to provide them with a motive

for their own *crime passionnel*. They are touching for no other reason except to perform their role as lovers.

After their “mortuary rituals” Chauvin tells Anne: “I wish you were dead” to which she replies, ‘I am’” (MC, 119). In telling Chauvin she is ‘already dead’ Anne takes control of the ending of the *crime passionnel* she witnesses in the beginning of the novel. Instead of allowing herself to be killed by Chauvin, she leaves on her own terms. The apocalyptic “fiery red rays” (MC, 120) that mark Anne’s departure from the café can be interpreted as forbidding and ominous or as signifying a new beginning. Either way, Anne faces whatever lies ahead on her own. Her reply changes the outcome of the original *crime passionnel*.

In Anne and Chauvin’s desire to reconstruct or solve the crime, they produce an alternative interpretation. The narrative suggests that as they ask questions and construct interpretations about the crime their own desires enter in, which changes the outcome of their ‘ending.’ They are unable to reconstruct the crime because their individual desires have an alternative effect on the structure they inhabit through the story telling. Likewise, when a reader attempts to interpret a story his or her own desires enter in which change the original story.

The end of *Moderato Cantabile*, like the end of *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein* leaves the reader confused and somewhat unsettled. The narrative does not make it clear whether this is a ‘bad’ or ‘good’ ending for the Anne. Duras does not allow her a ‘new’ beginning, although she has allowed her a ‘becoming.’ The text makes it clear that Anne is a different woman from the one she is in the beginning but does not suggest whether her transformation is positive or negative. As readers, we know that Anne’s child, who once sustained her life, is no longer around; someone else

takes him to his piano lesson (MC, 113). The narrative confirms that she is “again moving forward into the fiery red rays of a dying day” (MC, 120). Curiously the word “again” appears which implies that this is not the first time Anne is moving forward and away from a life she has left behind. The simple addition of this word can give new meaning to the conversations between Anne and Chauvin: perhaps she recognised him from the past? Perhaps she has left her husband and son before and returned? Either reading is possible and yet neither is confirmed.

Anne is not murdered, as is the woman in the *crime passionel*. She is not put on trial for her misconduct. There are no divorce proceedings, although all these things could logically follow such a transgression. The ending is inconclusive which leaves a reader questioning what this indeterminacy leaves us with. Leslie Hill contends that: “Duras’s refusal to subordinate desire to any prescriptive moral code is one of the main sources of disturbance and provocation in *Moderato Cantabile* [. . .] In desire, as the murder scene in *Moderato Cantabile* shows, one cannot tell what is literal or proper from what is figural or improper; and this loss of origin severely undermines the competence of any moral code to decide what is and is not legitimate or acceptable in the realm of desire.”²⁶⁴ Hill’s interpretation is a useful one to consider. He draws attention to the way Duras blurs the boundaries between what is ‘real’ and what is ‘imagined;’ this textual blurring is most explicit in the conversations between Anne and Chauvin. Hill also suggests that Duras’s refusal to make a clear distinction between the literal and the figural results in an undefined and non-judgmental approach to desire.

²⁶⁴ Hill, *Apocalyptic Desires*, p. 54.

As discussed, because Duras ends the novel with Anne's departure, she leaves the consequences of Anne and Chauvin's 'affair' unexplained. As readers, we can not be sure whether Anne is punished for her 'affair' or whether she will leave the town entirely and start a new life somewhere else. The ambiguity suggests that either conclusion is possible. However, both readings confirm that a change has taken or will take place. The suggestion that something has changed or will change is perhaps the most important implication because it aligns desire with production, not acquisition. Desire in Duras's texts makes connections, creates changes; it does not necessarily *mean* any one thing nor does it dictate terms.

This is a point worth considering further with regard to psychoanalytic and feminist interpretations of desire. Because the ending is left unclear it is possible to interpret the text within a psychoanalytic or a feminist framework, although, as suggested before, the text does not entirely correspond to either. For example, if we read the ending within a psychoanalytic framework, it is possible to suggest that the "again" which appears in the context of Anne's departure, is meant as a kind of refrain, suggesting that the desire in the text or the *crime passionnel*, will be performed again. The opening reference to a child's piano lesson corresponds well with the possibility of a final encore that demands the *crime passionnel* be re-played.

As discussed in the first chapter, Lacan theorises desire as man's desire for an Other's desire.²⁶⁵ In *Encore*, he states that "'Encore' is the proper name of the gap (*faille*) in the Other from which the demand for love stems."²⁶⁶ Because Anne leaves "again" as opposed to a 'first time,' it can be suggested that the "gap" in Anne remains and will cause another *crime passionnel* to occur. For Lacan, nothing is more

²⁶⁵ Lacan, *Encore*, p. 4.

²⁶⁶ Lacan, *Encore*, p. 4.

enigmatic than the process of repetition.²⁶⁷ The word repetition itself is close to the verb, 'to haul,' as Lacan points out, "very close to a *hauling* of the subject, who always drags his thing into a certain path that he cannot get out of."²⁶⁸ Duras 'hauls' her subject, Anne, dragging her down the same path as if to force recognition and yet she does so without assigning meaning to the trajectory. The path is repeated endlessly which slowly erases the path taken. The *crime passionnel* that is at once so central to the text slowly becomes secondary, if not invisible, to the process itself. In this way, Duras emphasises that the movement of desire is more important than an arrival or an origin, and end of a beginning. Like the Town Beach Ball in *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*, Duras does not refer to these "scenes of desire" in order to make meaning of them, as the psychoanalytic reader may want to do, instead she demonstrates their meaninglessness in comparison to the transformative effects desire has on her subjects.

From a feminist perspective it is possible to interpret Anne's decision to leave, and not to fully assume the identity of the dead woman, as expressing agency as well as a determination to leave her role as wife and mother. In his critique of *Moderato Cantabile*, David Cowart suggests that Anne undergoes a process of becoming, he writes: "*Moderato Cantabile* is not an *histoire d'amour*, or even much of a story, but a fable of a woman who loses the world and gains herself."²⁶⁹ The implicit suggestion in Cowart's analysis is that Anne, in leaving roles that determine her, is assuming her own fate and determining her own identity. Cowart's notion of 'becoming' and gaining 'self' is an inherent part of feminism, particularly a notion of

²⁶⁷ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 50-51.

²⁶⁸ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 51.

²⁶⁹ David Cowart, *Moderato Cantabile* (London: Grant and Cutler, Ltd., 1981), pp. 55-56.

feminism that is influenced by ideas of the sixties and seventies.

And yet, I would argue that the strength in the representation of women in Duras's novels lies in the fact that they do not fully fit the mold of feminist models that have been popularised by seventies feminist novels such as Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* or Lisa Alther's *Kinflicks* or by the onslaught of images in the eighties and nineties of 'girl' power, almost all of which suggest that a woman should be able to be strong, independent, and yet still feminine. Duras's representations of women pose an alternative to these models, which should remind reader and critic alike about the dangers and limitations of a static image of woman. As discussed in the first chapter, a politics based on a static image of woman denies the inherent multiplicity in women. As Diane Elam argues: "Women both are determined and are yet to be determined. There are established, pre-conceived notions of what women can be and do, at the same time that 'women' remains a yet to be determined category."²⁷⁰ In leaving her novels with ambiguity, Duras forbids her reader to define her female characters or to use them as a representation of woman. The uncertainty in the endings not only keeps desire from being defined and thus regulated, but they also keep woman from being 'solved' and thus used by feminist politics such as identity politics.

Although to a certain extent, Duras's texts do correspond with important issues in both psychoanalytic and feminist ideology, her work does not fit neatly into either framework. For this reason, as well as others, Duras's work is essential to theorising desire and the notion of 'woman.' Reading psychoanalytic and feminist critiques of Duras's work should remind a critic of the way each tries to make

²⁷⁰ Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction*, p. 27.

meaning of the text in a way that often overlooks the alternative representations and configurations that Duras's work presents. It should also remind critics of a shared dependency on a static representation of 'woman.' Both psychoanalysis and to a certain degree, feminism, rely on a static image of woman in order to theorise desire. In doing so they limit and restrict alternative representations both of 'woman' and of desire.

NARRATIVE CURES

Duras does not offer her readers a clear answer to the ambiguity in her novels. Desire, in Duras's novels, retains an element of the unknown or the beyond within its structure. This point is explicitly made in the following dialogue between Anne and Chauvin: "'I'd like to understand why his desire to have it happen one day was so wonderful?' [. . .] 'There's no use trying to understand. It's beyond understanding.' 'You mean there are some things like that that can't be gone into?' 'I think so'" (MC, 116). Although Duras's work demonstrates that, to a certain extent, desire can be discussed and represented, she also insists that it remain undefined by leaving a crucial component of desire unanswered.

Although her work often responds to fundamental processes in psychoanalysis, such as alluding to an analyst figure in order to work through the implications of a central and repetitive image, her texts resist the most important step: the cure. The ambiguous and apocalyptic endings in *Moderato Cantabile* and *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein* leave the reader with uncertainty and irresolution. Duras's readers are left unsure what will happen next and even wondering whether it was a 'happy' or 'sad' ending. Julia Kristeva takes this absence of a narrative cure as

the central focus of her criticism of Duras's work in "The Malady of Grief." In her critique Kristeva argues that Duras's inability to 'cure' the text and to provide her reader with a narrative solution reflects her failure as a writer. Kristeva writes: "[Duras's] books [. . .] bring us to the verge of madness. They do not point it from afar, they neither observe or analyse it for the sake of experiencing it at a distance in the hope of a solution [. . .] There is no purification in store for us at the conclusion of those novels written on the brink of illness, no improvement, no promise of a beyond, not even the enchanting beauty of style or irony that might provide a bonus of pleasure in addition to the revealed evil."²⁷¹ The words that Kristeva uses such as 'solution,' 'purification,' and 'improvement,' avoid articulating the latent implication that what Duras's texts do not offer her readers is a 'cure.'

Kristeva's essay is an important one to consider, not only because of arguments she raises against Duras's work but also because she stands theoretically within psychoanalysis and feminism. From this vantage point, she offers a unique take on the problems of Duras's uncertain and ambiguous texts. Kristeva appears to be angry not only because Duras's text do not respond fully to the processes in analysis but also because the women in her novel do not offer her readers a 'positive' representation of woman. In discussing women such as Lol and Anne, Kristeva writes: "Sadness would be the basic illness, if it were not, for Duras, women's sickly core: Anne-Marie Stretter (*The Vice-Counsel*), for instance, Lol V. Stein (*The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*), or Alissa (*Destroy, She Said*), to mention only three. It is a non-dramatic, wilted, unnameable sadness. A mere nothing that produces discreet

²⁷¹ Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 227-228.

tears and elliptical words.²⁷² Kristeva finds this “sickly” sadness in Duras’s characters particularly reprehensible because Duras does not offer any reconciliation for their suffering at any point in her novels.²⁷³ Once again, the central complaint that Kristeva levels at Duras’s writing is that Duras does not remedy the sadness she portrays.

Duras’s reluctance to ‘solve’ or ‘cure’ her narrative throws a psychoanalytic reader and, to a certain extent, a feminist reader off balance. Some psychoanalytic readers, such as Kristeva, are troubled by the absence of a ‘solution,’ particularly given Duras’s use of analytic processes in her narratives. And yet, Jacques Lacan, after reading *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein* wrote a “Hommage” to Duras praising her for understanding his theories without having read them. Duras is one of the only writers so loved and hated by psychoanalytic and feminist readers alike. The fact that she appeals so strongly to both psychoanalytic and feminist critics makes her an important writer to examine, particularly with regard to the question of desire. And yet, because of her ambiguous and enigmatic style, she also remains one of the most difficult and infuriating writers to critique. On the one hand, the presence of a definitive ending or representation of woman offers readers a more accessible way of talking about desire or ‘woman.’ And yet, on the other, the indeterminate endings and representations in Duras’s work offers feminist readers a chance at examining how a lack of restrictive and singular interpretations of desire and ‘woman’ can function.

Leaving her texts ambiguous and undefined, Duras allows desire and ‘woman’ to be “determined and yet undetermined.” This indeterminacy means that a

²⁷² Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 239.

²⁷³ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 240.

reader must question and examine the possibilities both in desire and 'woman,' instead of coming to fixed conclusions or meanings of either. Desire, in Duras's work, is left 'unsolved,' which emphasises production, not acquisition. In other words, desire is figured as something that creates connections, that keeps things in motion and something that causes and underlines change as opposed to something that ends with possession or determines limitations and boundaries. Duras's notion of desire poses an alternative to psychoanalytic and feminist interpretations in that it does not correspond directly with either. However, because Duras's work does engage with each to a certain extent, her writings offers critics a way of negotiating the limitations and possibilities in each.

5. DELEUZE, GUATTARI AND FEMINISM

Duras's work offers her readers another way of looking at the question of desire and of 'woman.' Her resistance to a narrative 'cure' leaves her texts with a certain degree of ambiguity and 'lack.' As discussed, this indeterminacy forces a reader to question accepted or established notions of desire and 'woman.' Duras's writing shares many similarities to Deleuze and Guattari's work in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. Deleuze and Guattari's thinking encourages an approach to reading that examines how a text creates and sustains desire as opposed to what it means or signifies. Their work challenges fundamental concepts in psychoanalysis by interrogating assumptions that are made, such as does the psychoanalytic 'cure' really cure? Their questions, and more importantly, their style of thinking, poses an alternative way of theorising desire.

INTRODUCTION

One of the more pressing reasons to explore psychoanalytic models and criticisms is to expose a certain way of thinking, to suggest alternative models and to find ways to escape the dominant discourse of psychoanalysis. This thesis is an attempt to perform such an exploration; it also involves an examination of the boundaries of feminist theory, boundaries that can, at times, be more limiting and constricting than helpful. The logical next step for feminists is to consider other theorists who are struggling with related issues concerning desire in discourse and to look for analogous alternatives to those offered in the psychoanalytical model –

allies, in other words. At first glance Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari appear as an answer to my feminist search for alternatives. However, a closer look reveals the problems that arise from their line of questioning. Deleuze and Guattari do not offer a unified theory to contradict psychoanalysis, and perhaps that is why feminist theorists do not often use them. As Michel Foucault warns readers in the preface to *Anti-Oedipus*: "It would be a mistake to read *Anti-Oedipus* as the new theoretical reference (you know, that much-heralded theory that finally encompasses everything, that finally totalizes and reassures, the one we are told we 'need' so badly' in our age of dispersion and specialization where 'hope' is lacking.)"²⁷⁴ However, to dismiss Deleuze and Guattari on the basis of such a shortcoming would be to deny the possibilities in their work for a feminist rethinking of desire in discourse.

Deleuze and Guattari's works, both individually and collectively, are far-ranging and dense. For this reason, I will focus on *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, two texts that make up their collection on 'Capitalism and Schizophrenia.' In the first section, this chapter addresses ways in which Deleuze and Guattari's work opens up alternative possibilities for theorising desire. Deleuze and Guattari question the underlying foundations of psychoanalysis and in so doing refigure desire and the way we read for desire. The second half of this chapter focuses specifically on the relationship between Deleuze and Guattari and their feminist readers in order to question a feminist suspicion of using Deleuze and Guattari in conjunction with feminist readings of desire. I argue that feminist critiques focus more on the limitations than on the possibilities Deleuze and Guattari offer in

²⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, "Preface" to *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, Helen R. Lane (London: The Athlone Press, 1996 original publication in French, 1972), pp. xi-xiv, (p. xii).

rethinking desire. I also argue that feminist critics often lapse back into a psychoanalytic approach in order to contradict the theoretical moves Deleuze and Guattari make.

DELEUZE AND GUATTARI'S STYLE

Feminist theorists have often avoided using Deleuze and Guattari to talk about desire; considering the amount of work Deleuze and Guattari have written and the focus they place on desire in their theories, this omission is telling. Perhaps one of the reasons for feminist trepidation is the style in which Deleuze and Guattari write. Their writing can be confusing at times, contain too many 'in-jokes,' and often rely on repetitions or allow inconsistencies. And yet, some of the greatest potential in Deleuze and Guattari's work lies in the style in which it is written. *In A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, a text that is more for the avid reader of Deleuze and Guattari than for the beginner, Brian Massumi suggests that: "Deleuze recommends that you read Capitalism and Schizophrenia as you would listen to a record."²⁷⁵ As Massumi goes on to explain: "[Deleuze and Guattari's] hope [. . .] is that elements of [their writings] will stay with a certain numbers of its readers, weaving new notes into the melodies of their everyday lives."²⁷⁶

Most readers of Deleuze and Guattari do take a certain part with them as they close the text; whether an aspect of their style or a concept they elucidate. What is important here is that Deleuze and Guattari attempt to create a style that does not

²⁷⁵ Brian Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), p. 7.

²⁷⁶ Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 7.

insist that the reader leave with a unified idea in mind. They are not proposing a grand narrative for their readers to subscribe to after their disappointments with psychoanalysis. To return to Michel Foucault's interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari's project, they are not trying to offer a 'new' and 'improved' theory for their readers to cling to or to reassure themselves with.

In many ways it is good and necessary that Deleuze and Guattari do not offer their feminist readers, or readers in general, a master-discourse. Firstly, to impose grand meanings and definitions would only provide readers with ready-made tools to use in textual interpretation. Secondly, to offer up a new master-discourse to that of psychoanalysis would not be an alternative rather it would be another complex logic for readers to follow. Deleuze and Guattari's project is to see ways outside master-discourses, such as psychoanalysis, not to reinscribe their readers into another all-encompassing framework. This lack of a totalising theory is, in some ways, part of the reason for a feminist resistance to Deleuze and Guattari. Feminism as a philosophical movement has often relied on a critical opposition or hierarchy; it opposes that which it perceives as oppressing its own agenda. Deleuze and Guattari do not provide the right amount of resistance or friction. Despite the well argued criticisms against Deleuze and Guattari, one has the sense that they would only nod and acquiesce, not fight back.

Instead Deleuze and Guattari offer different approaches, alternative perspectives, and even a sense of humour to combat the heavy-handed tone of psychoanalysis. Of course it is not as simple as it sounds, and it will take more than good humour to come up with alternatives to a field of study as vast and influential

as psychoanalysis. However, it seems to be that Deleuze and Guattari are on their way to something productive.

In his work on Deleuze and Guattari and the politics of desire, Philip Goodchild argues that: "The most striking aspect of *Anti-Oedipus* is its style and humour: as a theory, it only gains significance through the ways in which it affects a reader, creating machinic relations and desires."²⁷⁷ To read desire in discourse with Deleuze and Guattari's theories in mind encourages readers to make connections, to follow movements, to create new possibilities instead of closing them down with interpretative solutions. For example, in order to define the Oedipal triangle, Deleuze and Guattari ask: "What ought to go inside the Oedipal triangle, what sort of thing is required to construct it? Are a bicycle horn and my mother's arse sufficient to do the job? Aren't there more important questions than these, however?"²⁷⁸ Deleuze and Guattari's sense of humour is upfront and confrontational. It is not for everyone. However, it does dismantle the seriousness of psychoanalytic interpretations. Their sense of humour voices the doubts and outright confusion that many have with psychoanalytic terminology and theoretical assumptions. It also initiates a move beyond the construction of psychoanalytic concepts, in this case the Oedipal triangle, towards a line of questioning that focuses on how these constructions work not what they mean.

In their two volumes on capitalism and schizophrenia, Deleuze and Guattari make reference to the problems inherent in accepting psychoanalytic interpretations

²⁷⁷ Philip Goodchild, *Deleuze and Guattari: An Introduction to the Politics of Desire* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), p. 52.

²⁷⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (London: The Athlone Press, 1996; original publication in French, 1972), p. 3. Subsequent references will appear in the text after "Anti-O."

without question. They make statements such as: "We are all Archie Bunker at the theater, shouting out before Oedipus: there's my kind of guy, there's my kind of guy!" (Anti-O, 308) that bring the discussion into a humorous arena as well as onto a level that is accessible to those outside the academy or outside the psychoanalytic field. In doing so, they not only approach the dominance of psychoanalysis at the level of its reception but they mock the way psychoanalytic theory has entered the homes of most everyone in the western world, even Archie Bunker's. This example also demonstrates one of the central concerns in Deleuze and Guattari's work: the way Oedipus has been dissolved into the social arena and accepted as fact, left unquestioned and unchallenged.

LACK VS. PRODUCTION

In theorising desire in discourse the most fundamental problem feminist theorists have with psychoanalytic interpretations is with "lack." As discussed in the first chapter, psychoanalytic interpretations of desire posit lack at the centre of the movement between subject and object. Lack is understood as the driving force in desire and is often associated with female sexuality. One of the most important moves Deleuze and Guattari make, particularly for feminists, is to rethink desire outside of lack and outside a negative framework. In her early work on desire and Hegel, Judith Butler argues that Deleuze's theory moves desire from a negative interpretation towards a productive one. She writes: "Deleuze's theory prescribes a move from negative to productive desire which requires that we accept an emancipatory model of desire."²⁷⁹ Although Deleuze and Guattari do move away

²⁷⁹ Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 213.

from a negative construction of desire, one commonly associated with a psychoanalytic one, they do not fully accept the positive or productive reading of desire, that Butler suggests.

Deleuze and Guattari begin their rethinking of desire with Plato's distinction between desire as production and desire as acquisition, a division that Deleuze and Guattari feel is wrong from the beginning: "From the moment that we place desire on the side of acquisition, we make desire an idealistic (dialectical, nihilistic) conception, which causes us to look upon it as primarily a lack: a lack of an object, a lack of the real object" (Anti-O, 25). Thinking about desire in terms of acquisition introduces a lack within the subject desiring. Put simply, one must lack something in order to desire something. Conceptualising desire in terms of acquisition forces a lack within the subject that can only be fulfilled by the object of desire, an object that will never actually be acquired. This structuring of desire follows the psychoanalytic model. As Elizabeth Grosz succinctly phrases a psychoanalytic interpretation of desire: "To provide desire with its object is to annihilate it. Desire desires to be desired."²⁸⁰

Deleuze and Guattari object to aligning desire with acquisition and yet they do not simply hold up production as a solution; to choose production over acquisition would only support the binary oppositional relationship that Plato constructs. Deleuze and Guattari also acknowledge that psychoanalysis does not simply choose acquisition in its theorisation of an object of desire (or *objet petit a* in Lacanian terms); they are not unaware of the link psychoanalysis makes between desire and

²⁸⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, "Refiguring Lesbian Desire," p. 71. See also, Catherine Belsey's *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture*: "Desire is the desire of the other precisely as other, and it characteristically includes the longing for closure," p. 37.

production, as they write: "Desire thus conceived as production, though merely the production of fantasies, has been explained perfectly by psychoanalysis" (Anti-O, 25). The key phrase here is 'the production of fantasies,' with this distinction Deleuze and Guattari isolate the difference between their project and that of psychoanalysis. Instead of understanding desire as only a production in fantasy, or in the imaginary or symbolic domains, Deleuze and Guattari want to understand desire in the real, the social, or even within the splitting between the real and the imaginary. Deleuze and Guattari do not simply promote production instead of lack; rather they problematise the psychoanalytic usage both of lack and of production and locate that problem in the use of the imaginary and symbolic to structure desire.

Deleuze and Guattari locate the lack in the subject as well as the object in desire. Instead of understanding desire as lacking its object they claim that desire is lacking a fixed subject (Anti-O, 26).²⁸¹ In this way, they shift the emphasis in the movement of desire towards an in-between territory; or, to use their terminology, a "deterritorialized" space (Anti-O, 35). Lack in Deleuze and Guattari's refiguration becomes an *effect* of desire, rather than an origin (Anti-O, 27). The shift that they make in emphasising the subject rather than the object has important bearings on feminist revisions of desire in discourse. As discussed in Chapter One, when lack is located in the object and driven by fantasy, woman often becomes the bearer of these fantasies. To shift the 'burden' of the lack suggests some possibilities and limitations

²⁸¹ In her article entitled "Feminist Assessment of Emancipatory Potential and Madonna's Contradictory Gender Practices," Lynn O'Brien Hallstein argues that Deleuze and Guattari introduce Georges Batille's theorisation of excess into their understanding of desire: "Thus, Deleuze and Guattari argue that desire, the investment of human energy for satisfaction, is fueled by excess energy and lacks nothing, which means desire is excessive, has no permanent object, structure, or pre-ordained form; it is characterised by continual flows of connections. Desire, then, is the radically free investment of energy without any boundaries, with the capacity to create a radically free unconscious." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 82 (1996), pp. 125-141, (p. 126).

that have largely been overlooked.

Figuring desire in terms of a movement between subject and object keeps desire active and productive. In Deleuze and Guattari's rethinking, desire moves along deterritorialized lines. Unlike a psychoanalytical model, desire does not move within predetermined limits. To explicate this point, Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between their conception of productive desire and psychoanalytic desire through the figure of a tree and a rhizome in *A Thousand Plateaus*. In their argument, a tree is representative of movement that begins and ends, that has a starting point and ending point and that imposes the verb 'to be.'²⁸² This structure gives way to questions such as: 'Where are you going?', questions that Deleuze and Guattari suggest are useless (T-P, 25). On the other hand, the rhizome in Deleuze and Guattari's figuration represents the middle or in-between territory and is linked with the conjunction 'and.' The figure of the rhizome rejects a linear pattern in favour of a groundless and infinite structure.²⁸³ Deleuze and Guattari connect these figurations to desire by suggesting that: "Once a rhizome has been obstructed (sic), arborified, it's all over, no desire stirs; for it is always by rhizome that desire moves and produces. Whenever desire climbs a tree, internal repercussions trip it up and it falls to its death; the

²⁸² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1996; original publication in French, 1980), p. 25. Subsequent references will appear in the text after "T-P."

²⁸³ In drawing attention to Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the "rhizome" I am not suggesting that they are the only thinkers who construct a figurative 'in-between territory' or 'groundless structure.' For example, in *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time*, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth discusses Vladimir Nabokov's "anthematic" system in a way that demonstrates Nabokov's use of "elaborate interlacements and expanding clusters" in his writing (198). She argues that "Nabokov's 'anthemion' is like Cortázar's 'polychromatic rose' design [...] where every departure implies a return, not in terms of a single pattern of rationalized space or time but in terms of a multiplex figure-in-process," a conception that anticipates Deleuze and Guattari's, p. 198; see also, pp. 194-210.

rhizome, on the other hand, acts on desire by external, productive outgrowths" (T-P, 14). The model of a tree is akin to the psychoanalytic structure of desire. As discussed in chapter one, when desire comes close to its limit (marked by the term *jouissance*) in the psychoanalytical model, it ends and begins again within another object. To put this in simpler terms: the fulfilment of a man's desire for the latest model of his favourite car is always delayed by the arrival of the next latest model. Desire in these terms moves from beginning to end and back again. The figure of the rhizome suggests that desire can be understood in terms of the connections it makes and how it links things together creating an assemblage of desire. Deleuze and Guattari's model does not fix itself in any one object or subject, rather it encourages its own expansion and movement through the connections it makes. The linking 'and' inhibits an arrival at any one object or within any one subject.²⁸⁴ Deleuze and Guattari's model of desire does not rely on lack to structure and motivate desire as does the psychoanalytical interpretation. Their alternative model opens up new ways to think about desire as well as about subjectivity and objectivity, as will be discussed later.

REFRAMING THE GRAND NARRATIVE OF OEDIPUS

Deleuze and Guattari's refiguring of desire stems from their rereading of Freud's Oedipus complex and of the analytic scene. In order to contradict the

²⁸⁴ Deleuze and Guattari's model of desire can be extended into an argument on postmodernity and desire, however, there is not space in this thesis both to make these connections fully nor to enter into a discussion as to whether Deleuze and Guattari actually support the doctrines in postmodernism, as there are many differing debates on this subject alone. For a discussion on postmodernism and desire see also 'postmodern love' in Catherine Belsey's *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture*, pp. 72-96; for a discussion on Oedipus and postmodernity see also Slavoj Žižek's "Wither Oedipus," *Analysis*, 8 (1998), pp. 146-160.

dominance of the master discourse of psychoanalysis, they turn to the most important narrative in psychoanalytic interpretations: Oedipus.²⁸⁵ For Freud, the Oedipus complex is the underlying foundation of psychoanalytic interpretation,²⁸⁶ as he argues: "Every new arrival on this planet is faced by the task of mastering the Oedipus complex; anyone who fails to do so falls a victim to neurosis."²⁸⁷ To summarise briefly: the boy desires his mother and feels aggression towards his father until he is able to repress his aggression and transfer his erotic feelings for his mother into a sense of identification with his father. The child must master the Oedipus complex before he commits the same crime as Oedipus. 'Mastering' the Oedipus complex amounts to repressing and internalising desires. As Deleuze and Guattari argue: "And everybody knows what psychoanalysis means by *resolving* Oedipus: internalizing it so as to better rediscover it on the outside, in social authority, where it will be made to proliferate and be passed on to the children" (Anti-O, 79). Here Deleuze and Guattari suggest that the Oedipus complex is an inherent part of social authority as well as an 'inherited' trait. Deleuze and Guattari argue that there is an inherent social need to codify and inscribe the movements of desire. They write: "The prime function incumbent upon the socius, has always been to codify the flows of desire, to inscribe them, to record them, to see to it that no flow exists that is not properly damned up, channelled, regulated" (Anti-O, 33). Honeymoon suites, gay bars, singles clubs, 'adults only' stores testify to the ways in which desire is spatially regulated and channelled.

²⁸⁵ See also Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, pp. 200-204.

²⁸⁶ Freud writes: "With the progress of psychoanalytic studies the importance of the Oedipus complex has become more and more clearly evident; its recognition has become the shibboleth that distinguishes the adherents of psychoanalysis from its opponents," *On Sexuality*, pp. 149-50, footnote 1.

²⁸⁷ Freud, *On Sexuality*, p.149, footnote 1.

The social inheritance of the Oedipus complex is at the centre of Deleuze and Guattari's argument against psychoanalysis in *Anti-Oedipus*. They do not question whether or not there is an Oedipus complex, rather they focus on the ways in which we are Oedipalised. In order to do so, Deleuze and Guattari contest aspects of Freud's methodology. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that Freud discovers a "dirty, little secret" called sexuality that he keeps within the family in order to monitor and contain its boundaries.²⁸⁸ As they humorously suggest: "It was as though Freud were asking to be forgiven his profound discovery of sexuality by saying to us: at least it won't go any further than the family! The dirty little secret, in place of the wide open spaces glimpsed for a moment" (*Anti-O*, 270).

Deleuze and Guattari depict Freud as a blind, old man; a man who cannot see the possibilities that lie beyond his own front doorstep or someone who sees the possibilities, then slams the door shut. Or perhaps they suggest that he is an Oedipal figure, blinding himself to the 'truth' of his own sexuality. Either way, Deleuze and Guattari argue that Freud reduces all the possibilities in understanding sexuality into the familial constellation governed by the Oedipus complex. As they argue: "Hence, instead of participating in an undertaking that will bring about genuine liberation, psychoanalysis is taking part in the work of bourgeois repression at its most far-reaching level, that is to say, keeping European humanity harnessed to the yoke of daddy-mommy and *making no effort to do away with this problem once and for all*" (*Anti-O*, 50). Instead of liberating sexual desire, Deleuze and Guattari argue that

²⁸⁸ Deleuze and Guattari's argument shares many similarities with Michel Foucault's line of thinking in *The History of Sexuality*: "Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home" trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), p. 3. To draw a distinction: Deleuze and Guattari question the validity and necessity of the psychoanalytic 'cure,' whereas Foucault questions the social acceptance of repression in the history of sexuality and the critical discourse that surrounds repression.

psychoanalysis, Freud in particular, restrains the possibilities of sexuality by positing it within the confines of the family and under the yoke of the Oedipus complex. Deleuze and Guattari recognise the Oedipus complex and the castration complex as narratives that limit and confine desire.

Freud's theorisation of the Oedipus complex is dependent on both his own self-analysis²⁸⁹ and on textual analysis. As discussed in Chapter One, Freud reads Sophocles's text in order to interpret and analyse how it relates to unconscious fantasies and desires not as an example of one instance of desire, but as a totalising grand narrative.²⁹⁰ In this way, the figure of Oedipus becomes a dominant figure in psychoanalytic interpretations on desire and as such becomes the central focus in Deleuze and Guattari's work for untangling the emphasis psychoanalysis places upon Oedipus. As they argue: "psychoanalysis undoes [myth or tragedy] as objective representations, and discovers in them the figures of a subjective universal libido; but it reanimates them, and promotes them as subjective representations that extend the mythic and tragic contents to infinity" (*Anti-O*, 304). In other words, according to Deleuze and Guattari, Freud takes the myth of Oedipus and transforms it into the unconscious narrative of human development.

Deleuze and Guattari argue that Freud constructs the myth of Oedipus into a grand narrative, an underlying structure of truth, knowledge, identity, and

²⁸⁹ "Freud's self-analysis, leading to the abandonment of the trauma theory and the recognition of infantile sexuality and the Oedipus complex," in *On Sexuality*, 28.

²⁹⁰ It is interesting to note that recent work on Freud's Oedipal complex by French psychiatrist, Michel Juffé, questions why Freud places blame on Oedipus and not on his parents: "Freud [. . .] made the mistake of placing the responsibility on the supposedly irresistible impulses of Oedipus which compelled him to kill his father and marry his mother." Paul Webster, "Blame the parent not Oedipus, says Freud critic," *The Observer*, 21 May 2000, World, 28.

sexuality.²⁹¹ In order to undermine the strength of this grand narrative, Deleuze and Guattari confront and question Freud's theorisation and subsequent elevation of the Oedipal complex at several different levels. Firstly, they suggest that myths themselves, such as Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*, are forms of production only when connected to social production. They argue: "Thus in order to keep an effective grip on the zones of production, representation must inflate itself with all the power of myth and tragedy, it must give a *mythic and tragic presentation* of the family – and a familial presentation of myth and tragedy. Yet aren't myth and tragedy, too, productions – forms of production? Certainly not; they are production only when brought into connection with real social production, real desiring-production" (*Anti-O*, 296-297). In other words, myths are not without their own social encoding, and so are problematic when used, as Freud does, as a totalising narrative of human condition. If Freud uses a narrative such as Sophocles's *Oedipus the King* to structure foundational theories in psychoanalysis, then Deleuze and Guattari ask: "*Why return to myth? Why take it as the model?*" (*Anti-O*, 57). In doing so, Deleuze and Guattari question psychoanalysis's insistence on solving the enigma of desire with an interpretative Oedipus complex; instead they insist that this 'narrative' be interrogated for how it does or does not create possibilities.

Deleuze and Guattari also try to address the way psychoanalysis understands the unconscious. They argue that in psychoanalysis: "The unconscious ceases to be what is it – a factory, a workshop – to become a theater, a scene and its staging. And

²⁹¹ In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari humorously suggest that the "International Psycho-Analytic Association [...] bears above its door the inscription 'Let no one enter here who does not believe in Oedipus'" (45) and as Freud argues at the end of *Totem and Taboo*: "At the conclusion, then, of this exceedingly condensed inquiry, I should like to insist that its outcome shows that the beginning of religion, morals, society and art converge in the Oedipus complex," as quoted in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay, p. 510.

not even an avant-garde theater, such as existed in Freud's day (Wedekind), but the classical theater, the classical order of representation" (*Anti-O*, 55).²⁹² Deleuze and Guattari not only question why psychoanalysis has been allowed to dominate theoretical discussions on the unconscious but they also chastise the use of classical representations instead of more complex and dynamic representations such as those offered in avant-garde theatre. Their criticism is both serious and tongue-in-cheek; they indict psychoanalysis for turning the unconscious into a theatre of representation and yet combine the charge with a ironic jab at choosing classical drama instead of contemporary (to Freud) theatre. Their criticism of Freud is emblematic of the style in which they confront psychoanalysis, as discussed earlier, and of the importance they give to the structuring of the unconscious in psychoanalysis. In *Deleuze & Guattari: An Introduction to the Politics of Desire*, Philip Goodchild explains that the primary objection Deleuze and Guattari have against psychoanalysis is in regards to understanding the unconscious.²⁹³ According to Goodchild, Deleuze and Guattari object to the way in which psychoanalysis avoids the power-relations within the unconscious and the relation of the unconscious to the social field.²⁹⁴ They also question the validity and viability of using myths and legends to explain the human condition. In other words, they ask, why Sophocles and not Antonin Artaud?

Deleuze and Guattari's interaction with Freud lead them to their central focus, Oedipus, and to their complaint against Freud for locating his mythical

²⁹² See also John Mark's analysis in *Gilles Deleuze: Vitalism and Multiplicity* (London: Pluto Press, 1998). Mark's writes: "In *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari react against the Freudian notion of the unconscious as a sort of 'classical theatre' which contains the key to consciousness. Instead they propose an immanent conception of the unconscious as being like a *factory* for producing desire. [...] In this way, Deleuze and Guattari attack the theoretical dependence on a certain interpretation of Freud and Marx; a pervasive 'Freudo-Marxism.' [...] Against this, they propose a machinic production of desire," p. 91.

²⁹³ Goodchild, *Deleuze and Guattari*, p. 124.

²⁹⁴ Goodchild, *Deleuze and Guattari*, pp. 124-125.

interpretation of Oedipus in the unconscious. Notably missing from this discussion so far is Lacan, who, for Deleuze and Guattari, takes a very different direction in his handling of the Oedipus complex. According to Deleuze and Guattari: "[Lacan] is not content to turn, like the analytic squirrel, inside the wheel of the Imaginary and the Symbolic; he refuses to be caught up in the Oedipal Imaginary and the oedipalizing structure" (Anti-O, 308). Believing the unconscious is structured like a language, Lacan does not surround the unconscious in an oedipalizing structure, as does Freud, instead he raises Oedipus to the level of self-critique (Anti-O, 310-311).

However, in doing so, Lacan replaces the Oedipal complex with the 'castration complex.' He sets up a dependency on castration instead of oedipalisation. As Deleuze and Guattari mockingly suggest:

I reach desire when I arrive at castration! What does the desire-castration equation signify, if not in fact a prodigious operation that consists in replacing desire under the law of the despot, in introducing lack there at the deepest levels, and in rescuing us from Oedipus by means of a fantastic regression. A fantastic and brilliant regression: someone had to do it, 'no one helped me,' as Lacan says, to shake loose the yoke of Oedipus and carry it to the point of its autocritique (Anti-O, 268).

Deleuze and Guattari relate this 'rescue' of Lacan's to a story of resistance fighters, who, wanting to blow up a pylon, balance the explosives so well that it falls back into its hole (Anti-O, 268). It is important not to miss the reference to the 'hole' as it plays with the way Lacan reduces desire to a lack, or void, that awaits to be filled by the signifying phallus. What Deleuze and Guattari suggest within this example is that although Lacan frees the Oedipal complex from the veil of the unconscious, he

places renewed emphasis on the castration complex as well as on the importance of the phallus in the movement of desire.²⁹⁵ Deleuze and Guattari suggest that although Lacan does not accept the Oedipus complex as a grand narrative he does elevate the castration complex as one. In either interpretation, desire comes up against the structuring narratives of psychoanalysis.

RE-READING DESIRE

In order to substantiate and develop their alternative construction of desire, Deleuze and Guattari also address some of the fundamental concepts within the scene of analysis. Most importantly, they question and interrogate the validity of the psychoanalytic 'cure.' Instead of subscribing to the notion of a 'cure' and to the neatly structured and organised Oedipal and castration complexes, Deleuze and Guattari want to relate the subject away from a notion of a unified subject and to the social production of the real, into fragments, flows, and multiplicities. In order to do so they turn to the processes in analysis. In particular, they re-read the way the analyst reads the expression and/or silence of the patient. Deleuze and Guattari argue that the analyst inscribes the patient into Oedipal and castration complexes in order to cure him or her.

They describe the scene as machinal: the analyst plugs the analysand into a desiring-machine as well as into a consciousness that manufactures fantasy. They argue that the process of being 'oedipalised' happens within the scene of analysis. In other words, the psychoanalyst no longer says to the patient: "Tell me a little bit about your desiring-machines, won't you?" Instead he screams: 'Answer daddy-and-

²⁹⁵ See also Jacques Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*," pp. 11-52.

mommy when I speak to you!” (Anti-O, 45). Deleuze and Guattari suggest that the analyst’s demands for the patient to recognise “daddy-and-mommy” relegates desire into the realm of fantasy and imagination. In locating and maintaining the processes of desire in the symbolic and the imagination, psychoanalysis treats desire as a fantasy, dream, myth rather than as a social construction, a movement or an actual event. Deleuze and Guattari attempt to restructure and refocus desire away from the imagination and fantasy and towards social production.

In analysing the psychoanalytic cure, Deleuze and Guattari question what they feel Freud did not: whether the cure actually cures. Instead of focusing on the obstacles to a ‘cure’ such as resistance, Deleuze and Guattari argue that it is necessary to discuss whether the cure itself is viable, they ask: “For what is the meaning of ‘so *that* was what *this* meant’? The crushing of the ‘so’ onto Oedipus and castration. The sigh of relief: you see, the colonel, the instructor, the teacher, the boss, all of *this* meant *that*: Oedipus and castration, ‘all history in a new version’” (Anti-O, 67). Deleuze and Guattari’s interpretation of the limitation of the psychoanalytic cure is very relevant to the critical reframing of psychoanalytic criticism offered both in this thesis and elsewhere. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that psychoanalysis inserts the Oedipal and castration complexes into the cure offered by the analyst. “So that was what this meant” refers to the retrospective movement of the psychoanalytic cure. Words, silences and images are gathered together, submitted to the Oedipalising and castrating machines and out pops the answer and the revelation ‘so that was what this means,’ at least within Deleuze and Guattari’s argument.

To force meaning upon a situation, particularly a sexual meaning, suggests that psychoanalytic readings produce ready-made answers or cures to abstract and enigmatic situations. The meaning producing that Deleuze and Guattari cite constructs its own history, its own narrative, and traces its lines along and within Oedipal and castration complexes. Deleuze and Guattari do not question whether or not we are Oedipalised or castrated, instead they question why we think subjectivity through these terms.

Through their engagement with Oedipus, Deleuze and Guattari rethink the emphasis Freudian psychoanalysis²⁹⁶ places on the Oedipal and castration complexes as well as how we can read for desire differently. They also argue that until we begin to examine and interrogate the boundaries and limitations of the Oedipus complex we are doomed to circle within its borders:

It is a lie to claim to liberate sexuality, and to demand its rights to objects, aims, and sources, all the while maintaining the corresponding flows within the limits of an Oedipal code (conflict, regression, resolution, sublimation of Oedipus) [...] For example, no 'gay liberation movement' is possible as long as homosexuality is caught up in a relation of exclusive disjunction with heterosexuality, a relation that ascribes them both to a common Oedipal and castrating stock [...] In short, sexual repression, more insistent than ever, will survive all the publications, demonstrations, emancipations, and protests concerning the liberty of sexual objects, sources, and aims, as long as sexuality is kept –

²⁹⁶ I am distinguishing here between Freudian psychoanalysis and Lacanian psychoanalysis noting that Lacan does not place the same emphasis on the Oedipal complex that Freud does in his theorisation of subjectivity.

consciously or not – within narcissistic, Oedipal, and castrating co-ordinates (Anti-O, 350-351).

Here Deleuze and Guattari raise some central limitations and possibilities for desire that are later considered and debated amongst feminist theorists. Firstly, sexual liberation, as a concept or reality, can not be actualised until desire is released from the constricting definitions imposed on it by psychoanalysis; namely those within narcissistic, Oedipal and castration complexes. Secondly, as long as sexuality is defined vis-à-vis heterosexual and Oedipal co-ordinates, it will have no hope of liberation or escape. Deleuze and Guattari use homosexuality as an example of the way in which sexuality is monitored and regulated by heterosexual standards and norms.²⁹⁷ Thirdly, and perhaps not explicitly addressed in the previous passage, is the erasure of static gender categories. For this Deleuze and Guattari turn to the notion of ‘becoming,’ which they address in more detail in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

Deleuze and Guattari suggest that we move away from interpretative solutions and towards becomings and intensities by questioning the framework of the analytic cure and the inheritance of Oedipus. Deleuze and Guattari argue against the meaning-making that they see as an inherent part of psychoanalysis and move towards a reading of desire that focuses more on how the text creates connections, rather than what these connections mean. As they write: “The unconscious poses no problems of meaning, solely problems of use. The question posed by desire is not

²⁹⁷ Leo Bersani argues a similar point in *Homos*: “The notion of gay identity can go no further: every move the invert makes manifests that identity. The subject fails to find himself in the world (fails to find the same) not because of an openness to difference, but rather because it is only by eroticising difference that the subject can hope for, or fantasize, the ‘possession’ of difference, and the consequent transformation of both the self and the world into exact replications of one another” (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 134. Bersani’s analysis follows along similar lines to Deleuze and Guattari’s argument. For Bersani, the world is divided into heterosexual paradigms that the homosexual must either desire to subscribe to or remain in the margins.

‘What does it mean?’ but rather ‘How does it work?’ [. . .] Desire makes its entry with the general collapse of the question ‘What does it mean?’” (Anti-O, 109). In his introduction to *Anti-Oedipus* Mark Seem refers to Deleuze and Guattari’s style of reading when he argues that they offer readers “*point-signs* that offer a multiplicity of solutions and a variety of directions for a new style of politics.”²⁹⁸

Deleuze and Guattari’s argument with regard to literary analysis is very similar to their restructuring of desire. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari write: “A book has neither object nor subject; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds [. . .] In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification” (T-P, 3). They do not locate desire in the subject or the object, as discussed earlier, rather they are interested in the multiple intersecting lines that make up desire and its movement. They apply this model to reading. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they write: “We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities” (4). In their approach to literature, Deleuze and Guattari offer a crucial distinction for the interpretation of desire in discourse and theory: to read a text for desire as a movement, or to see what desire creates, how it opens up new possibilities as opposed to the limiting interpretative readings.

In her introduction to *Deleuze and Feminist Theory*, Claire Colebrook distinguishes between the two approaches to reading with the words “interpretation”

²⁹⁸ Mark Seem, “Introduction,” *Anti-Oedipus*, xix. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari define a *point-sign* as: “a singular point in the entire network of the intensive body that responds to History, that vibrates with it,” p. 352.

and “inhabitation”²⁹⁹ which are helpful in trying to understand the politics of reading that Deleuze and Guattari offer their readers. Colebrook argues that Deleuze and Guattari’s active way of reading theory and/or text is similar to feminist readings. She asserts that: “Feminism has always been a question of what concepts do, how they work and the forces any act of thinking enables.”³⁰⁰ Colebrook connects the approach Deleuze and Guattari take to reading, asking ‘How does it work?’ rather than ‘What does it mean?,’ to feminist thought.³⁰¹ It appears that feminism and Deleuze and Guattari have everything to do with each other: they each activate theory, they engage in politics of desire and subjectivity, and they both search for alternatives to the dominance of psychoanalysis. And yet, as the second half of this chapter will explore, the very opposite holds true in the majority of feminist criticisms of Deleuze and Guattari.

THE FEMINIST RESPONSE: IRIGARAY, GROSZ AND BRAIDOTTI

Despite the possibilities Deleuze and Guattari’s work raise for feminist readings of desire in discourse, their work has more often been met with caution and even hostility by feminist readers. One of the primary difficulties that feminist theorists have with Deleuze and Guattari is with their terminology. Deleuze and Guattari move away from words like ‘identity,’ ‘gender,’ and ‘oppression’ which

²⁹⁹ Claire Colebrook, “Introduction,” in *Deleuze and Feminist Theory*, ed. by Claire Colebrook and Ian Buchanan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 1-17, (pp. 3-4).

³⁰⁰ Colebrook, “Introduction,” p. 9.

³⁰¹ Colebrook, “Introduction,” p. 8.

have often been the foundation of feminist politics.³⁰² The anxiety that some feminists have in using Deleuze and Guattari theoretically is obvious from the start. Feminists such as Elizabeth Grosz and Rosi Braidotti offer words of caution to their readers to clarify that although they may find some of Deleuze and Guattari's style or theories useful, they do not accept them completely; it is a signposting particular to feminist readings of Deleuze and Guattari.

In her essay titled, "A Thousand Tiny Sexes: Feminism and Rhizomatics," Elizabeth Grosz acknowledges this when she states: "Deleuze and Guattari's work is rarely discussed in the texts of feminist theory, even in those explicitly addressed to what is commonly called 'French theory' or French postmodernism."³⁰³ After this statement, the first in the essay, she goes on to explain feminist suspicions held against Deleuze and Guattari, including her own (Grosz, 189-190). She also outlines seven points of contention against Deleuze and Guattari as argued by Irigaray (Grosz, 189-190). Grosz's introduction sets up some of the feminist disagreements and apprehensions regarding Deleuze and Guattari. Her critique also demonstrates a structural dependency on Irigaray's interpretations. Grosz moves through rhizomatics, the "Body without Organs," and ethics, important foundations in Deleuze and Guattari's thinking, and then she halts at the 'becoming-woman.' On the

³⁰² Grosz makes this point in her analysis of Alice Jardine's criticism of Deleuze and Guattari's work in *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity*. Grosz argues that "[Jardine's] anxieties seem related to the apparent bypassing or detour around the very issues with which feminist theory has tended to concern itself: 'identity,' otherness, gender, oppression, the binary divisions of male and female -- all central and driving preoccupations of feminist thought." *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 162. Subsequent references will appear in the text after "Vol."

³⁰³ Elizabeth Grosz, "A Thousand Tiny Sexes: Feminism and Rhizomatics," ed. Constantin V. Boundas and Dorothea Olkowski, *Gilles Deleuze and the Theatre of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 187. Subsequent references will appear in the text after "Grosz." This statement is the first in the essay that emphasises Grosz's claim that Deleuze and Guattari have long been overlooked and dismissed by feminist theorists.

one hand, Grosz is attempting to consider the possibilities Deleuze and Guattari offer for feminist refigurations of subjectivity, the body and desire, and yet, on the other hand, she is stating that 'we,' as feminists, can only consider using them so far and then 'we' must stop.

Grosz's return to Deleuze and Guattari amounts to giving them a 'second chance.' She quotes herself from an earlier publication to reassure her reader that she comes back to Deleuze and Guattari with a new perspective as if to suggest that the first time around she and other feminist theorists, like Alice Jardine, were too harsh in their judgements. She states that the objective of the essay is to explore whether the feminist attacks against Deleuze and Guattari are fair (Grosz, 190). She then outlines six points of overlap between Deleuze and Guattari's theories and feminism:

1. Deleuze and Guattari challenge the dominance of binary logic (Grosz, 191).
2. They are interested in the question of difference; a difference that can be understood outside psychoanalytic constructions (Grosz, 192).
3. Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of politics is aligned with feminist politics in that they both affirm localised, non-representative struggles without a hierarchicalized organisation or definitive goals and ends (Grosz, 193).
4. Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the body, as theorised through the "Body without Organs," imagines the body as a discontinuous series of flows, movements and intensities. This figuration is important for feminism as it begins to think outside mind/body dualisms as well as outside definitive categories and identities (Grosz, 193-194).

5. Deleuze and Guattari rethink desire in positive and affirmative terms. Instead of framing desire within a negative lack, they theorise desire as positive and productive (Grosz, 194-195).
6. Finally, Deleuze and Guattari promote a code of ethics in lieu of a breakdown of both the rational, judging subject and the individual's indebtedness to the social community (Grosz, 196-197).

These six points 'in favour' of Deleuze and Guattari stand in contrast to the original seven points against them, those argued by Irigaray. In this way, the essay reads like a defence trial for Deleuze and Guattari. Grosz's concluding lines suggest that, although there are many possibilities in Deleuze and Guattari's texts for feminist theorists to consider, ultimately they are to be approached with the same caution that the essay begins with. Grosz ends her essay by warning her readers to "remain wary" as Deleuze and Guattari's theorisation of becoming-woman can lead to "a political obliteration or marginalization of women's struggles" (Grosz, 209). In other words, the 'becoming-woman' threatens to move beyond the question of woman before feminist theorists have had a chance to consider it and beyond a sense of history, which feminist theorists are anxious to protect. The instinct to protect and defend women's struggles that Grosz demonstrates in her critique of Deleuze and Guattari is not a bad one, however, it can be a dangerous one theoretically.

Grosz interprets Deleuze and Guattari interpreting feminism. She is careful to slap them on the wrist if they do not attend to the appropriate cure or necessary definition. For example, she writes: "In what ways does this [passage from *Dialogues*] contest, ameliorate, or act as restitution for the robbery of women's bodies by men, in the service of their goals, interests, machines, and habitual power

positions?" (Grosz, 206). But are Deleuze and Guattari theorising feminism? Are they actually engaging with feminism so as to create a better feminist politics? Or are feminist theorists angry that they do not take their struggles into account sufficiently? If so, are feminist theorists, like Grosz trying to 'cure' Deleuze and Guattari of their phallogentric symptoms by making them recognise sexual difference? Are they trying to make them non-sexist by re-historicising their theories?

In order to address these questions it is necessary to return to Irigaray's original objections against Deleuze and Guattari which have structured and influenced the subsequent criticisms offered by feminists such as Elizabeth Grosz and Rosi Braidotti.³⁰⁴

IRIGARAY AND THE POLITICS OF SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

Luce Irigaray asks questions that are integral to the focus of this thesis and to the focus of feminist politics; questions which seek to uncover a feminist discourse free from dominant master narratives. In *This Sex Which is Not One*, she asks: "how can women analyze their own exploitation, inscribe their own demands, within an order prescribed by the masculine? *Is a women's politics possible within that order?*"³⁰⁵ The inverse of this question is thrown at Deleuze and Guattari by many of their feminist readers. They ask: is it possible for male theorists to be aware of women's politics? Irigaray answers no. She argues that Deleuze and Guattari dismiss the importance and weight of women's history in their theorisation of the 'body without organs' and the 'becoming-woman.' In connection with the problem of

³⁰⁴ Julia Kristeva's writings, particularly in *Desire in Language* and on semiotics, could also have been considered in regards to Deleuze and Guattari's work in that each focus on a pre-Oedipal construction of language, identity and desire.

³⁰⁵ Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, p. 81.

creating alternatives to masculine discourses, Irigaray enters into a discussion of Deleuze and Guattari's work. Although not directly citing their names, her use of their terminology, particularly of the 'becoming-woman,' and the 'organless body' makes it clear to an informed reader whom she is addressing:

And doesn't the "desiring machine" still partly take the place of woman or the feminine? Isn't it a sort of metaphor for her/it, that men can use? [. . .] Or again: can this "psychosis" be "women's"? If so, isn't it a psychosis that prevents them from acceding to sexual pleasure? At least to *their* pleasure? This is, to a pleasure different from an abstract – neuter? – pleasure of sexualised matter. That pleasure which perhaps constitutes a discovery for men, a supplement to enjoyment, in a fantasmatic "becoming-woman," but which has long been familiar to women. For them isn't the organless body a historical condition? And don't we run the risk once more of taking back from woman those as yet unterritorialised spaces where her desire might come into being?³⁰⁶

The notion of the 'becoming woman' is an important one for feminism, both because of the possibilities it generates in issues concerning agency and the body, and in terms of the debate it generates. The issue of sexual difference is at the heart of the feminist trepidation in using Deleuze and Guattari as well as at the centre of debate and fracture within feminist politics. Sexual difference and questions concerning gender cannot be avoided or missed within feminist articulations of the body or of subjectivity, not to mention those concerning desire. Do we recognise sexual difference as constitutive, as founding and fundamental or is it secondary, accidental

³⁰⁶ Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, pp. 140-141.

and necessary to move beyond? It is for these reasons the 'becoming-woman' prompts the most division within feminist criticisms of Deleuze and Guattari. For example, the most recent work published on Deleuze and feminist theory is a collection of essays devoted solely to the topic of 'becoming-woman.'³⁰⁷ The feminist engagement with Deleuze and Guattari appears to be stopped at the 'becoming-woman,' halted in the tracks of the ongoing debate about sexual difference.³⁰⁸ Luce Irigaray has called it the question of our age,³⁰⁹ and it seems one that is destined to haunt and repeat itself through academic textbooks and theses.

Irigaray's work attempts to answer the question of sexual difference as well as to articulate this difference outside master discourses. Either her style of writing models how it *is* impossible for women to write their own politics without submitting their writing to a male order or she is attempting to construct a new style of writing that places her writing in direct contact/relation with the writings and theories of those she has set out to confront, such as Freud's and Lacan's. There are many times in *This Sex Which is Not One* where it is difficult for the reader to know where Freud ends and Irigaray begins, or as in the example cited above, whether or not she is referring to Deleuze and Guattari's work in particular. Irigaray seldomly uses footnotes or endnotes and often splices her own words with Freud's or Lacan's. For the reader who is well versed in psychoanalysis, this distinction is easier to make, yet for the inexperienced reader, the two different writers can be mistaken for one.

³⁰⁷ *Deleuze and Feminist Theory*, eds. Ian Buchanan and Claire Colebrook, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.

³⁰⁸ See also Verena Andermatt Conley, "Becoming-Woman Now," in *Deleuze and Feminist Theory*, ed. by Ian Buchanan and Claire Colebrook (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 18-37. Conley discusses the feminist debate over the 'becoming-woman,' particularly in regards to Hélène Cixous's work.

³⁰⁹ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Gillian Gill and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). Irigaray writes: "Sexual difference is one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age" p. 5.

Irigaray's writing style seems contradictory to the theories she argues. On the one hand, she argues for a recognition of two distinct voices in contrast to the monosexual logic of psychoanalysis and phallogentric discourse. And yet, on the other, she is blending the two discourses into one.

One way to explain this discrepancy is to look at Irigaray's latest book, *I Love to You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*. As discussed briefly in Chapter Two, Irigaray theorises a relationship between the sexes which acknowledges sexual difference as *the* fundamental difference. For Irigaray, this difference is to be respected and recognised by each sex.

In *I Love to You* Irigaray envisions a way for men and women to recognise their sexual difference while, at the same time, being able to appreciate and respect that difference. She expands upon some of the ideas developed initially in "When two lips speak together," the final chapter in *This Sex Which is Not One*. Unlike Deleuze and Guattari who want to see difference as multiple, Irigaray wants the difference to be located primarily within the sexual difference between man and woman. She envisions this difference operating within a framework of recognition: "I recognize you, thus you are not the whole; otherwise you would be too great and I would be engulfed by your greatness. You are not the whole and I am not the whole."³¹⁰ Irigaray's dialectics of recognition³¹¹ can be read in terms of her theories on castration in *This Sex Which is Not One*. Instead of recognising herself as lacking, the little girl can recognise that she is different and therefore not the same, but not

³¹⁰ Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 103.

³¹¹ The phrase 'dialectics of recognition' comes from reading Luce Irigaray's *I Love to You* and Hélène Cixous's "First Names of No One," *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, p. 33.

less worthy or missing something.³¹²

Although Irigaray's theorisation of difference offers some possibilities for feminist refiguring, there are some clear limitations in her argument that are noticeable from the start. Firstly, she relies on a "generic female identity" in order to establish this recognition. She argues that: "Women's liberation, and indeed the liberation of humanity, depends upon the definition of a female generic, that is, a definition of what woman is, not just this or that woman."³¹³ To define 'woman' leads to limitations of the possibilities inherent in women; to posit a definition of 'woman' enacts a limit on what woman can be, what she is and what she will be.³¹⁴ Irigaray has often been accused by feminist readers of essentialising woman, a debate that will not be developed in this chapter, but has been worked through at length by others.³¹⁵

Another limitation that has been considered more recently is the implicit stress Irigaray places on a heterosexual framework for her 'recognition.' The pivotal characters in Irigaray's refiguring of history are 'man' and 'woman.' For some, such as Drucilla Cornell and Judith Butler, this stress excludes homosexual relations from the happy history Irigaray theorises.³¹⁶ It also universalizes the position of 'man' and

³¹² To briefly summarise the castration complex: a little girl recognises, through looking at a little boy, that she lacks a penis and is therefore expected to feel a sense of lack and to desire a child to replace this void.

³¹³ Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 65.

³¹⁴ See also Elam's discussion in her chapter entitled, "Questions of women," in *Feminism and Deconstruction*, pp. 27-66.

³¹⁵ For a discussion on feminist resistance to Deleuze and Irigaray: how they overlap and yet offer possibilities to their feminist readers, see also Dorothea Olkowski, "Body, Knowledge and Becoming-Woman: Morpho-logic in Deleuze and Irigaray," in *Deleuze and Feminist Theory*, pp. 86-127. For claims for and against Irigaray's essentialism see also: Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*; Naomi Schor, "This Essentialism Which is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray," in *The Essential Difference* ed. by Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1994), pp. 40-62; Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*.

³¹⁶ See also "The Future of Sexual Difference: An Interview with Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell," Pheng Cheah and Elizabeth Grosz, *Diacritics* 28.1 (1998), pp. 19-42.

‘woman’ in a way that precludes alternative perspectives.

For me, the difficulty in accepting Irigaray’s ‘I Love to You’ is the stress she places on a happy cure, an interpretation that can solve, or will solve the problematic tension between man and woman. Instead of questioning the framework altogether or throwing the question of sexual difference into crisis, Irigaray wants to solve or to cure the ‘lack,’ to insert something more feminist, or perhaps more democratic. The problem however lies within the plugging, inserting movement and within the need to interpret and solve the rift between man and woman *once* and *for all*. The problem is that no cure can provide healing for all: if we are different, as Irigaray stresses, then there cannot be *one* solution or even *a* history. In this instance it would be helpful to take Irigaray’s need to solve the problem of sexual difference and apply it to Deleuze and Guattari’s resistance and interrogation of the psychoanalytic cure.

In her essay, “Is Sexual Difference a Problem?” Claire Colebrook addresses the issues and debates argued by feminist theorists over the question of sexual difference. Following the rhizomatic thinking of Deleuze and Guattari she considers whether we, as feminists, could ask the question of sexual difference in another way. Her re-questioning focuses attention away from who is right or wrong towards the type of questions asked and what these questions do³¹⁷ – a methodology that stems from the way in which Deleuze and Guattari rethink the cure. In returning to the psychoanalytic scene Deleuze and Guattari do not look for the obstacles that prevent it from happening, rather they question whether the cure actually cures. In a similar way, Colebrook is not trying to solve or answer the question of sexual difference, she is attempting to reformulate the question or the framework in which it is asked. Her

³¹⁷ Claire Colebrook, “Is Sexual Difference a Problem?” in *Deleuze and Feminist Theory*, ed. by Ian Buchanan and Claire Colebrook (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 110-127, (p.161).

methodology stems from reading Deleuze and Guattari's theories and demonstrates one way they can be used by feminist critics to rethink feminist theory.

RETHINKING SUBJECTIVITY

Recent feminist theorists, like Rosi Braidotti and Elizabeth Grosz, have overlooked some of the possibilities in Deleuze and Guattari's work because of their political alliances to feminism. On the one hand, their solidarity within feminism is necessary in a media-driven culture that increasingly dismisses the need for feminism; however, on the other hand, this solidarity sometimes inhibits them from exploring and/or accepting other possibilities in Deleuze and Guattari's work. Even though many feminists disagree with Freud, Lacan, Derrida or Foucault, there is rarely as much caution and uncertainty in the feminist critiques of their work.³¹⁸

Theorists like Rosi Braidotti and Elizabeth Grosz make use of the lateral thinking in Deleuze and Guattari when thinking about subjectivity. However, their alternative figurations of subjectivity ground themselves in a retrospective mapping of identity that follows psychoanalytic structures. Their refiguring leads them back to the meaning producing that Deleuze and Guattari argue against in psychoanalytic constructions of identity. In *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, Braidotti attempts to construct an alternative way of thinking about subjectivity. Her nomadic subject is a political fiction,³¹⁹ a figuration that allows her to think through defined boundaries and categories. In

³¹⁸ As Verena Andermatt Conley writes: "Where the texts of Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan have been a mainstay of feminist theories on subjectivity for several decades, welcoming receptions of Deleuze's philosophy have been few and far between," in "Becoming-Woman Now," p. 18.

³¹⁹ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 4. Subsequent references will appear in the text after "Nomad."

thinking about this alternative figuration, Braidotti uses Deleuze and Guattari's deterritorialized subjectivity as well as their lateral thinking to structure her nomadic subject. She also relies on her own experiences to ground her nomadic subject, to take responsibility for it, and to create a retrospective map of the places she has been (Nomad, 6). However, in doing so, Braidotti slips away from the rhizomatic thought of Deleuze and Guattari and into a more psychoanalytic mode of thinking.

Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatics is central to Braidotti's nomadic subject. Braidotti defines the 'rhizome' as a root that grows sideways. As discussed earlier, the rhizome represents an in-between territory in Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical model. For Braidotti, this structure expresses a lateral way of thinking as opposed to a non-linear, hierarchical way of thinking which Braidotti likens to phallogocentric modes of thought. In order to connect Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatics with her nomadic subject she maps out the roots and origins of feminism and subjectivity as well as her own nomadic mappings. To begin with, Braidotti refers to Adrienne Rich's 'politics of location.' Rich advocates for a feminist politics that begins with the material of the body. However for Rich, saying 'the body' immediately introduces a multiple set of identities such as: white, female, lesbian and Jewish.³²⁰ Braidotti adopts Rich's politics in her theorisation of her own experiences; this is particularly evident in the way she traces her 'origins.' For example, she introduces herself as born in Italy, raised in Australia, schooled in Paris and currently residing in the Netherlands (Nomad, 8-9). She reminds her readers that her book is a translation without originals as it has been written and translated into several different European languages (Nomad, 1). Braidotti explains this mapping of her own experiences as a

³²⁰ Adrienne Rich, "Notes Towards a Politics of Location," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 637-649, (p. 638).

retrospective movement; one that produces identity as well as one that lays down the foundations for her theorisation of the nomadic subject.

This 'mapping' can be found in other feminist critiques of subjectivity. For example, in her work on feminism and corporeality *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Elizabeth Grosz tells her readers, as does Braidotti, that her collection has been written in many different places and during different times amidst different continents and spaces (Vol, xiii-xiv). On the one hand, this information is there to excuse any lack of coherence or to excuse material that may be more dated than others, and yet on another, Grosz's mapping of her intellectual experience models itself after Rich's politics of location and Braidotti's nomadic subject. The information offered by Braidotti and Grosz is there in order to underline and emphasise the status of the nomadic critic who is enabled by social status to move through different boundaries, whether spatial, national, personal or intellectual. Each writer offers herself as a narrator, not only of the explicit ideas that follow between subjectivity and corporeality, but also of the implicit suggestions of fluidity and movement that stem from Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatics.

However, this retrospective mapping is more aligned with psychoanalytical models of identity construction than with Deleuze and Guattari's thinking. As mentioned previously, Deleuze and Guattari argue against the meaning-making of the "so *that* was what *this* meant," the crushing of the Oedipal and castration models into identity formation. They argue against the interpretative model that traces origins in order to pin down meanings. In Braidotti's move to include her personal experiences she performs a meaning-making of her own life. For example, she writes: "I have experienced this in my own existence: it was not until I found some

stability and sense of partial belonging, supported by a permanent job and a happy relationship, that I could actually start thinking adequately about nomadism” (Nomad, 35). In other words, she argues that it is not until she has settled into a more static identity that she can see the possibilities in nomadism: a retrospective movement as opposed to the rhizomatic thinking that Deleuze and Guattari’s theorise.

Braidotti’s “nomadic subjects” and Grosz’s “volatile bodies” are representative of a desire to think outside phallogentric logic. And yet they also represent the problems that arise in doing so. In *Volatile Bodies*, Grosz’s project involves reframing the way in which the body is socially constructed and challenging the discourses that surround the theorisation and understanding of the body. Her focus, like many feminist projects, particularly Irigaray’s, is to rethink the ways in which the body has already been thought. She wants to see the female body framed within a positive structure rather than a lack.

The problem that Grosz encounters is that to see the body in a positive framework immediately introduces it back into the dualisms and binaries that she is trying to think beyond. Although Grosz uses the body as a framework for working through subjectivity instead of the mind, her project organises itself around the figure of the Möbius strip, which Lacan likens to the subject (Vol, xii-xiii).³²¹ She uses this inverted three-dimensional figure eight to structure her chapters, her argument, and as a touchstone for the multiple and inverted ideas she is trying to bring together. The wager that she takes is to invert the emphasis on the mental processes of subjectivity to look instead at the way bodily processes influence subjectivity. In her final

³²¹ I have used Grosz’s spelling. See also Malcom Bowie’s discussion of the Moebius (sic) strip in *Lacan*, pp. 192-193.

chapter, entitled 'Sexed Bodies,' she admits that she is not offering a new concept of the body for feminist consumption, rather she is laying out the history of ideas surrounding the body in an attempt to rethink some of the assumptions and complications that arise.

Whereas Grosz clearly states her need to think the body outside dualisms (particularly that of mind/body or male/female), trying to theorise this into a framework of positive/lack, only reintroduces the binaries and dualisms. Introducing the framework of Lacan's Möbius strip only ensures that there will be no way out of psychoanalytic structures. At the same time trying to reframe the terms used to write the body requires stating those terms, understanding those terms, and most likely using those terms in order to reframe or rewrite. Although an alternative may be reached it is more likely to be one that still contains the language and logic of the original. Grosz's project demonstrates the difficulty and perhaps the impossibility of using existing logic to revisit, or revise ideology. Although her interest in *Volatile Bodies* is to reframe the body in theory, by the end of the book she writes: "I have not attempted to give an alternative account, one which provides materials directly useful for women's self-representation [. . .] I am not suggesting that what is to follow represents a new non-patriarchal or feminist framework; it clearly does not" (Vol, 188-189). In citing this statement I am not suggesting that Grosz is contradicting herself nor am I trying to expose an inconsistency in her argument. I refer to this statement in order to suggest that attempts to rethink the female subject, body or desire in positive terms often leads theorists to the recognition that these attempts are impossible when considered within the very logic one wants to revise.

Wanting to make meaning from experience, to chart places we have been in order to examine who we are, all these tracings, mappings, and figurations are desirable because they construct identity and create subjectivity, and yet they are no more real or grounded or feminist than what has come before. Braidotti wants to construct new points of exit from old modes of thought and yet falls into trouble with the very terms she uses. To want new things from old, to consume old modes of thought to spit out new ones,³²² all these trajectories operate within an old model of thinking. In order to move sideways, as Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic thinking entails, one has to abandon the notion or hope of moving forward.

Braidotti and Grosz's nomadic figurations posit a new subjectivity or way of thinking about subjectivity; however, it is one that falls back into the psychoanalytic construction of identity. Although they each make use of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic style of thinking, they lapse into psychoanalytic mapping in order to chart the moves they take in constructing an alternative figuration of subjectivity. In doing so, they find themselves trapped within the same logic and confines that they originally began with.

BRAIDOTTI'S "ORGANS WITHOUT BODIES"

Rosi Braidotti's project in *Nomadic Subjects* makes use of Deleuze and Guattari's terminology and yet does not seem to engage directly with the theory behind their work or, as discussed, she engages with the theory only to a point and then reverts into a psychoanalytic structure to ground her theories. For example, Braidotti's 'Organs without Bodies' is theoretically very different from Deleuze and

³²² I am referring here to Braidotti's strategy of consuming the old to generate the new. As she writes: "I have referred to this technique as the metabolic consumption of the old in order to engender the new," *Nomadic Subjects*, pp. 38-39.

Guattari's 'Body without Organs.' Braidotti borrows the term, 'Body without Organs' to theorise her "Organs without Bodies;" however, unlike the attention Deleuze and Guattari give to the 'Body without Organs' as a surface for libidinal intensities and flows, Braidotti's reversed version concentrates on the effects new technologies have on the female body.

Deleuze and Guattari's 'Body without Organs,' referred to as 'BwO,' appears in both collections of 'Capitalism and Schizophrenia.' In the first volume, *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari devote a chapter to 'The Body without Organs,' and in *A Thousand Plateaus*, they include another chapter called "How Do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs?" In *Anti-Oedipus*, the 'BwO' is able to avoid being hooked up or connected to capitalist desiring-machines (15). For Deleuze and Guattari: "The BwO is desire; it is that which one desires and by which one desires" (T-P, 165); "The BwO is the *field of immanence* of desire, the *plane of consistency* specific to desire (with desire defined as a process of production without reference to any exterior agency, whether it be a lack that hollows it out or a pleasure that fills it) (T-P, 154). That is, the body is not regulated or organised by the castration complex or a privileging of one organ over another (i.e. the Phallus). It is deterritorialized in the sense that it is free from categories like gender and sexuality. The 'BwO' is a figuration for Deleuze and Guattari, a model that can avoid the repressing triangulation of the Oedipus complex, for it has no parents, and a figure that can resist the capitalist machine. It is very difficult to visualise this 'BwO' which is one reason it becomes problematic to those attempting to use the 'BwO' theoretically. It also implies a body undefined by categories of gender or sex, issues that feminist readers take up in their discussions of sexual difference.

However, Braidotti does not take on these issues in referring to the 'BwO.' Instead she discusses biotechnologies that, in her assessment, threaten to create symmetry amongst women's reproductive organs that would reduce them into procreative bodies. Braidotti uses biotechnologies as an example of the dangers associated with removing organs from the totality of bodies. For example, she refers to the position of the biotechnician who fixes his/her microscopic gaze on the organisms below, and in so doing, loses sight of the human shape (to which they are a part) or even the temporality of life – "it's 'living' in the most abstract possible way" (Nomad, 47).

Braidotti links this scopic knowing with the invasive looking performed by the gynecologist who looks inside the mother at the unborn child. For Braidotti, this inward glance is metaphorical of the search for one's own beginnings or the triumph of the image. She argues that this visual look inwards may also lead to a fragmentation of the body that would encourage body parts to be seen and used as commodified objects instead of parts of a whole. As Braidotti argues: "In a perverse twist, the loss of unity of the 'subject' results in the human being lending its organic components to many a prostitutional swap: the part for the whole" (Nomad, 52-53). This interchangeability of organs, in Braidotti's argument, leads to symmetry between male and female bodies. The breakdown of sexual difference as well as a movement towards a 'beyond' sex makes Braidotti nervous that new technologies and/or pop culture representations will begin to define the maternal as well as woman before feminists have a chance to refigure the question for themselves (Nomad, 55).

And yet Deleuze and Guattari's 'BwO,' as discussed, represents a breakdown of sexual difference. Perhaps Braidotti intends for the discrepancy in meaning

between 'Organs without Bodies' and 'Body without Organs' in order to make use of the friction. If so, she does not explicitly state this intention. I would argue instead that she uses the term more to make use of the feminist debate surrounding the term 'BwO' than the theory behind the term as Deleuze and Guattari use it in their work. The term 'BwO' for Irigaray in particular is symptomatic of the way male philosophy appropriates female bodies, as she argues: "For them isn't the organless body a historical condition? And don't we run the risk once more of taking back from woman those as yet unterritorialised spaces where her desire might come into being?"³²³ Irigaray argues that the 'BwO' or, the 'organless body' as she refers to it, represents the way in which women have not been allowed to own their own bodies, subjectivities or their own desires. Irigaray calls upon history to argue that women have not been given the rights to their own bodies or desires and so for male philosophers such as Deleuze and Guattari to theorise bodies away from women is not only a threat to feminist projects but emblematic of male appropriation of women's spaces. In this sense, Braidotti's 'organs without bodies' is more closely linked to Irigaray's criticism³²⁴ of Deleuze and Guattari's 'BwO' than to their theory of the 'BwO.'

The fear expressed in both Irigaray's criticism and Braidotti's theorisation of the 'BwO' is justified and yet it dismisses the possibilities in the model of the 'BwO' for a feminist reading of desire. Instead of perceiving the 'BwO' as a threat against discovering female desire, it is possible to see Deleuze and Guattari's project as offering an alternate model to theorising the body. In *Volatile Bodies*, Grosz agrees that the risk of engaging with Deleuze and Guattari's 'BwO' is worth the threat it

³²³ Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, p. 141.

³²⁴ See also, Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, pp. 24-25.

poses to feminism (173). She argues convincingly for a reassessment of the 'BwO' for the potential it holds in theorising the body, even a feminist body. For Grosz, the 'BwO' "invokes a conception of the body that is disinvested of fantasy, images, projections, representations, a body without a psychical or secret interior, without internal cohesion and latent significance" (Vol, 169).

Deleuze and Guattari's 'BwO' is removed from the Oedipal confines and classical representations of psychoanalytic structures. For that reason it provides theorists with an alternate figuration of the body and of subjectivity to that offered in psychoanalysis. While the 'BwO' does not offer a model without problems for feminists, it does offer an alternative, one that deserves more attention and theorisation with regard to the possibilities it presents.

CONCLUSION

Most of the feminist writing discussed within this chapter, that in Braidotti, Grosz and Colebrook, has been influenced by Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic thinking. The lateral placement of ideas, the stumblings and inconsistencies, the nomadic positioning: all these come from Deleuze and Guattari's innovative and radical return to desire in theory. However, the feminist engagement with Deleuze and Guattari is characterised more by its caution signs than by the possibilities it offers.

Feminist critics who do use Deleuze and Guattari's theories often lapse back into a dependency on psychoanalytic models of desire and subjectivity or resist making full use of the terms Deleuze and Guattari theorise. The fall back into psychoanalytic interpretations could give validity to redundant arguments that

suggest feminists are “dutiful daughters” to their psychoanalytic forefathers. However, I would argue that these returns more accurately represent the difficulties that lie within attempts at constructing alternatives to psychoanalytic interpretations. As discussed in regards to Irigaray’s and Grosz’s writing, the language they use to talk about identity or desire is so saturated with psychoanalytic inscriptions that it is hard to avoid falling into the very traps one is criticising.

The cautionary notes that frame feminist readings of Deleuze and Guattari are perhaps necessary. However, it is also necessary to continue our engagement with Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas, theories and style for they do offer alternative ways of approaching desire in discourse as well as theoretical models that help feminists find their way out of psychoanalytical pitfalls. Deleuze and Guattari’s work opens up possibilities for alternative conceptions of desire. Their resistance to cure the narrative of desire, whether in fiction or theory, activates the movement of desire. The questions they pose to psychoanalysis offer alternative ways to approach the dominance of psychoanalytic interpretations. Instead of dismissing them because they are male or because they do not explicitly engage with feminist debates, it is possible and productive to see them as equals on a search for ways out of master discourses and grand narratives.

CONCLUSION

Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical approach to desire accepts indeterminacy as part of its structure. Although the call to resist solutions and remedies is refreshing in the face of restrictive and stifling psychoanalytical frameworks, it is not a call that has definite answers nor does it replace one logic with another. Deleuze and Guattari's work does not offer a unified theory that "finally totalizes and reassures," to borrow Foucault's words. So what does this uncertainty leave us, as critics, in regards to a theorisation of desire?

Throughout this thesis I have suggested that any final interpretation of desire is problematic. The difficulty with such a claim however is that it does not offer a 'solution' or an alternative logic to use instead; such an assertion presents indeterminacy without explaining how this relativism functions morally or politically. An inherent part of breaking down and interrogating structures is an uncertainty over whether or not they should be reassembled.

As discussed in the last chapter, despite their intentions of moving beyond psychoanalytic horizons, theorists such as Braidotti and Grosz often lapse back into psychoanalytic terminology or logic in order to ground their alternative figurations. With these theoretical pitfalls in mind, I am reluctant to offer a definitive or conclusive ending to this project. 'Making meaning' out of desire means setting up limitations and restrictions to the movement in desire. The moment a definition or answer is demanded other possibilities cease to exist. Instead of trying to formulate a

theoretical framework to explain and regulate desire I would prefer that desire was left a question, one that is continually negotiated and yet never fully understood.

HAVING THE LAST LAUGH

In an effort to provide some conclusion to the indeterminacy I have raised as well as a way of returning to some of the central concerns in this thesis, I turn to Yve Lomax's artistic piece cleverly titled, "Lack's Last Laugh." This piece appeared in an exhibition entitled "Difference on Representation and Sexuality" in September 1985 at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London alongside work by other major feminist artists including; Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, Mary Kelly, Marie Yates, and Ray Barrie.³²⁵ Her work reflects both a psychoanalytic and a feminist response to desire and "lack."

Lacks's last laugh

Fearing the lack of the whole we journey to seek its presence. Between two elements we search for a link – surely this will allow us to arrive at the whole. What is it we fear we lack and how shall we exactly know when we arrived, wholly satisfied? Around and around we go. Desire only comes when Something goes. Yes but also no. The whole withdraws itself, it goes into hiding and creates a telling lack. By way of all absence all is set in motion for the whole to be brought back. In the name of absence the whole totalises the parts. It forms a constellation of which it is a non-part. Representation hinges upon lack and this makes all the difference. If we no longer play that game of hide and seek.

³²⁵ Information taken from Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, feminism and the histories of Art*, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 155.

Laughter with a thousand edges. No part can ever stand alone; it takes many lines to make a specific part. The title, the head – that too is an open part. A part which constantly rings with other parts. There is no sovereign or whole meaning; no one message going down the line.³²⁶

Lomax's piece recalls the role 'lack' plays in both psychoanalytic and feminist interpretations of desire. Because, psychoanalysis positions woman as 'lack' in the movement of desire, feminists often try to reinterpret and revise this logic. As discussed in Chapter One, French feminists, Irigaray and Cixous, try to reframe 'lack' within positive and multiple images, such as Irigaray's "two lips" and Cixous's notion of a "cosmic body." And yet, because these interpretations rely on a psychoanalytic foundation, they do not actually present viable alternatives to a theorisation of desire.

The question Lomax poses, "What is it we fear we lack and how shall we exactly know when we arrived, wholly satisfied?" implies that "fear" causes feminists to react and respond to a psychoanalytic use of "lack." She suggests that if we, as feminists, are not afraid of being theorised as 'lack,' then we will no longer involve ourselves with circular debates that continually return to the 'truths' of psychoanalysis. The next line, "around and around we go," emphasises the endless nature of these arguments. As Schneeman's "Vulva's School" demonstrates so well, there is always another theory that tries to revise or refigure the "lack" in female desire.

³²⁶ Yve Lomax as quoted by Pollack in *Vision and Difference*, p. 178.

However, I would argue that it is not so much fear that keeps feminism from moving beyond a psychoanalytic “lack,” but the ways in which feminist theories on desire are indebted to their psychoanalytic ‘fathers.’ Because psychoanalysis maintains such a strong and influential grasp on desire, it is difficult to theorise desire without having to mention Freud and Lacan. Instead of trying to oppose or react to these theories I would argue that it is necessary to reconsider the way we, as feminists, frame our examination of desire. Instead of revising psychoanalytic interpretations into feminist ones, or trying to cure psychoanalysis by giving it lessons in feminism, we can expose the inadequacy of *any one* model or framework to understand and explain desire. As Lomax concludes: “there is no sovereign meaning or whole meaning; no one message going down the line.” In other words, instead of insisting that psychoanalysis has desire all wrong, we can insist that no one field of thought is capable of fully theorising desire by itself. In doing so, we, as theorists, can encourage an interdisciplinary or “crossdisciplinary” approach which keeps psychoanalysis and feminism as well as other disciplines continually responding to the question of desire instead of settling on one conclusive answer.

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